



THE LIBERTY "76" BOYS OF '76

A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, February 4, 1901, by Frank Tousey.

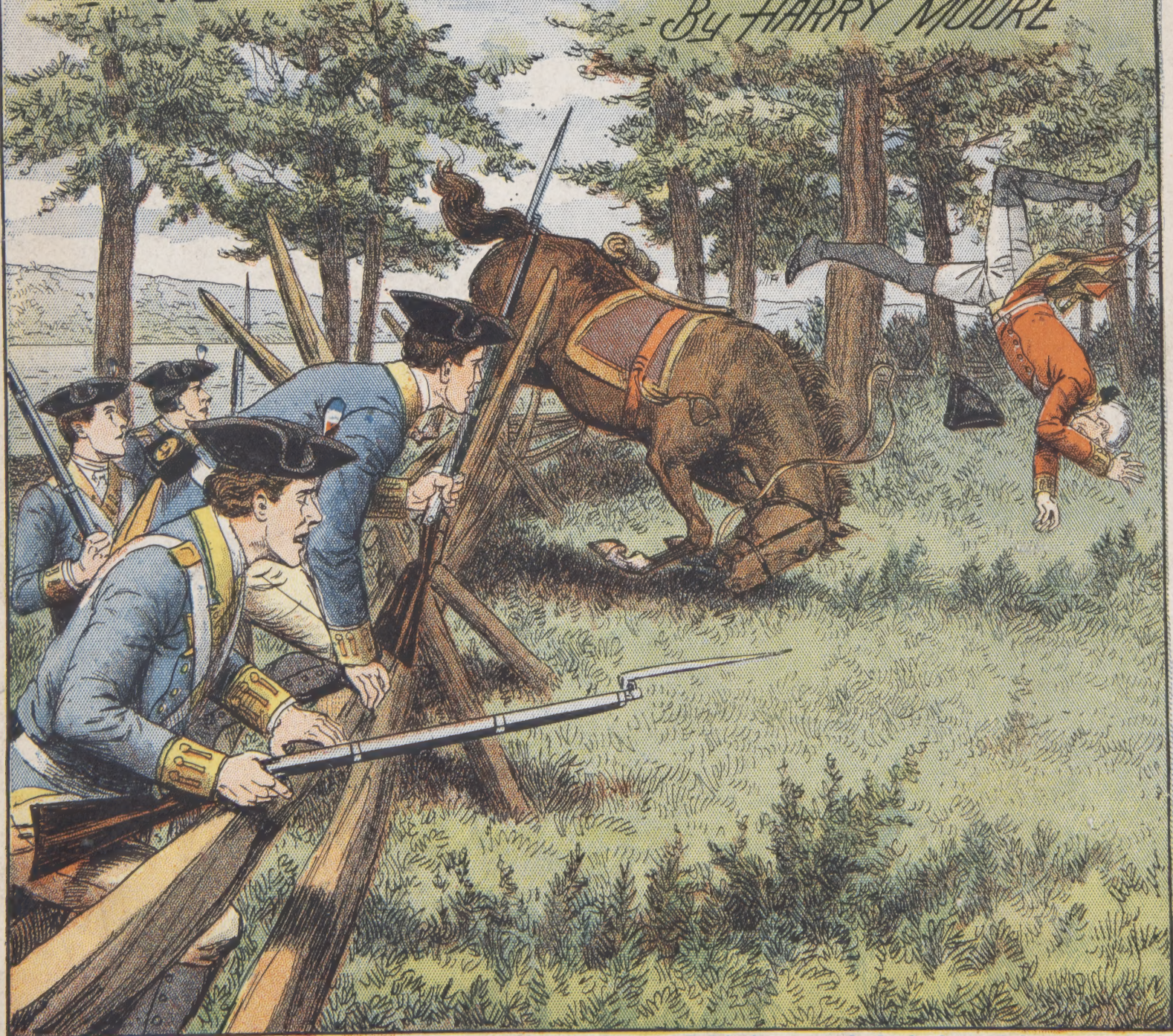
No. 245.

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 8, 1905.

Price 5 Cents.

THE LIBERTY BOYS ON THE NEUSE RIVER; OR, CAMPAIGNING IN NORTH CAROLINA.

By HARRY MOORE



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CHAPTER I.

A DESPERATE LEAP.

"We have you now, my bold young rebel!"

"Have you?"

"Yes! Surrender in the name of the king!"

It was the month of February of the year 1781.

The scene was one of thrilling interest.

Standing on a high bluff overlooking the Neuse River, in northern North Carolina, was a young man of perhaps twenty years. He was a handsome, manly-looking young fellow, with clear, keen gray eyes and a firm chin, and he was dressed after the fashion of the country people of that region and time, in homespun blue, with coarse shoes and a slouch hat.

The youth's back was to the edge of the bluff and he was facing a cordon of British soldiers at least twenty in number, who had him hemmed in, the line of soldiers extending from the edge of the bluff at one side of the youth around to the bluff again, thus cutting off his retreat.

The leader of the party of redcoats was a captain, a dark-faced, sinister-looking officer, who would evidently not hesitate at anything. It was he who had uttered the words with which this story opens.

The youth in question was no other than Dick Slater, one of the most famous characters in any way connected with the history of the Revolution.

He was famous both as a spy and as the captain of a company of youths of about his own age who were known as "The Liberty Boys of '76."

At the time of which we write General Cornwallis, with the British army of the South, was at Hillsboro, on the Neuse River, while General Greene, with the patriot army of the South, was just across the Dan River, about fifteen miles to the northward.

Dick Slater had been sent down to spy upon the British, in the hope that he might learn the intentions of the British commander, and had accidentally been seen by this party of redcoats, who were returning to their encampment from a foraging expedition, and had been chased by them.

He had suddenly been brought to a stop by the precipice, and before he could slip away up or down the bank of the stream, the redcoats had put in an appearance and had hemmed him in, the captain having then demanded that he surrender in the name of the king.

But Dick Slater was not the kind of fellow to surrender, save as a last resort.

He did not want to permit himself to be taken into the British encampment, for General Cornwallis knew him, and the chances were that he would be shot as a spy with very little ceremony.

The Liberty Boy preferred to take desperate chances, for in doing so he would still have a chance for his life.

He decided to parley a few minutes, if possible, and try to throw the redcoats off their guard, when he might by a sudden dash break through and escape.

This seemed to be his only chance, for the precipice at his back was at least forty feet in depth, and to fall or leap from its edge did not seem to promise much, save death, or at least serious injuries.

"You are making a mistake," said Dick, quietly.

The redcoats smiled skeptically.

It was evident that they did not believe this.

"A mistake, eh?" remarked the captain.

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"In bothering me."

"Of course you would say so," sarcastically.

"It is the truth."

"Bah! You can't fool me. You are a rebel, and you have got to surrender and go into camp with us."

"You will be wasting time in bothering with me."

"We will risk that. Are you going to surrender?"

"No!" Dick's voice was firm and decided.

"Oh, you are going to show fight, eh?"

"Why not? If I permit you to take me into your encampment the chances are good that I will be shot; is it not so?"

The captain smiled coldly.

"Yes, that is likely what will happen," he acknowledged.

"Then I would be a fool to surrender, would I not?"

"Well, that's as may be. If you offer resistance we will make a prisoner of you, anyway, in spite of all you can do; and you will get roughly handled. On the other hand, if you surrender quietly you will escape that and may not be put to death."

Of course, Dick did not tell the captain that Cornwallis knew him, and that it would be as much as his life was worth to surrender.

Dick did not intend to surrender, and he was weighing the chances of escape. He felt that it would be useless

to try to break through the line of redcoats; there were too many of them, and they would surely capture him.

The only other thing to do was to leap over the precipice.

This would be taking big chances, but it was better than the other way, the youth felt certain, and so, when the British captain, taking Dick's silence to mean that he would yield quietly, ordered some of his men to advance and bind his arms, the youth turned quickly, looked downward to see if it was a clear drop to the water, and then leaped boldly over!

A cry of amazement and horror escaped the lips of the British soldiers.

They had not expected this move on the young man's part.

They had supposed that he would surrender quietly.

But they did not know Dick Slater.

He was ready always to take long chances in order to escape capture.

Down he shot toward the water forty feet below.

The sensation of rapid descent was a sickening one.

He struck the water feet first and went under out of sight like a shot.

The redcoats rushed to the edge of the precipice and looked over.

They saw the daring youth strike the water and disappear underneath its surface.

They watched eagerly, but a minute passed and the youth did not come to the surface.

The redcoats drew long breaths and then uttered exclamations:

"He's a goner!"

"Yes—drowned!"

"What a fool he was!"

"Yes, he should have surrendered quietly."

The captain shook his head and gazed thoughtfully down at the water.

"It is my opinion, men, that that young fellow was an important spy," he said.

"Do you think so?" queried one.

"I'm sure of it; otherwise he would not have taken such desperate chances in order to try to escape capture."

"That seems reasonable."

"I am sure that I am right. I wish I knew who he was."

"Maybe he was that famous rebel spy that we have heard so much about, Captain."

"You mean——"

"Dick Slater."

The captain looked thoughtful.

"He was just about the right age to be Dick Slater," he said; "but my understanding is that Slater and his Liberty Boys operate exclusively in the North."

"I haven't heard of them being in the South myself."

"Still, they might be down in this part of the country and we not know of it."

"Yes, that's so."

"Well, there is no use fooling away any more time here; the fellow is dead."

So they set out in the direction of the British encampment, and when they arrived there the captain went to General Cornwallis and reported that he and his men had cornered a rebel spy on a bluff overlooking the river, and that the spy had leaped over the precipice and been drowned.

"Humph!" grunted the general. "I wish you had captured the fellow. The chances are that I could have forced him to give up some important information."

"Likely you are right, sir; but I did not think of such a thing as that he would be so desperate as to leap over the precipice."

"It proves that he was indeed a spy, and likely an important one."

"So I think, sir."

CHAPTER II.

THE WOODCHOPPER.

What of Dick Slater?

When he struck the water and went under his wits were about him and he realized that if he came right back up to the surface the redcoats would shoot him, so instead of rising, he struck out under the water and swam toward the shore.

A little fringe of bushes grew out from the bank, and Dick came up with his head just underneath these bushes. He was hidden so completely that, although the redcoats were looking right down toward where he was, they did not see him.

Dick had not been injured by the fall. He had struck the water feet first, and as the water was deep, he was not brought up short, but his descent was stayed gradually, so that he was not injured.

It was a marvelous escape, however. Such a lucky escape would not be likely to happen twice.

Dick thanked his lucky stars that he had escaped. He was glad now that he had taken the chances.

He listened and could hear the murmur of voices of the redcoats on the top of the bluff above him.

"I wish they would go away," he thought.

Presently they could no longer hear the voices, and he judged that the British had gone.

"Likely they think that I was drowned," was the youth's thought.

Dick's teeth were all but chattering, for the water was quite cold.

It was the month of February, but it was warm for the time of year. There was no ice, and indeed it was more like a spring day in the North than winter.

Still, the water was so cold that Dick was eager to get out of it and to a spot where he could wring out his clothing.

He decided to take his chances of being seen, and so he let go his hold on the bushes and swam slowly and cautiously down the stream, keeping as close to the bluff as possible.

The bluff was so steep that he had to go down stream about half a mile before coming to a point where he could make a landing.

Then he drew himself out upon the shore.

He rose to his feet and looked all around him keenly and searchingly.

No one was in sight.

"I guess the redcoats have gone on to the encampment," was his thought.

He undressed and wrung the water out of his clothing and then donned it again.

He was blue from cold and his teeth were chattering.

"But that doesn't matter," he mused, cheerfully. "It is nothing, as compared to being taken into the British encampment a prisoner."

He leaped about to get his blood to circulating, and gradually grew warm and comfortable, comparatively speaking.

Then his mind recurred to the work that had brought him to this part of the country.

He had come down to spy on the British, and to, if possible, learn something regarding the intentions of General Cornwallis.

Cornwallis and the British army had recently finished chasing the patriot army clear across the state of North Carolina, and when the patriots under General Greene succeeded in getting across the River Dan into Virginia the British general turned back and went into camp near Hillsboro, on the Neuse River.

General Greene was eager to learn the plans of Cornwallis, and he intended, as soon as he could get his army augmented sufficiently by recruits from among the patriots of the region, to give the British a battle.

The patriot general was making a wonderful campaign.

A portion of his army, under General Morgan, had defeated and routed Tarleton and a strong British force at the Cowpens in South Carolina, and now if Greene could strike Cornwallis a strong blow it would go far toward destroying the supremacy of the British in the South.

Dick Slater was a youth who stuck to his work under difficulties as well as when things were going smoothly, and he had no intention of giving up the attempt to secure information simply because he had met with misfortune at first.

He was down here in the vicinity of the British encampment, and he would secure information before returning to General Greene or he would know the reason why.

Dick had ridden to within a mile of the village of Hillsboro and had dismounted and tied his horse to a tree in the deep timber bordering the Neuse River. It was soon after leaving his horse that Dick had been discovered and chased by the party of redcoats.

He was now ready to resume the work where he had been forced to leave off, but he hardly knew what to do.

"I will have to wait till after dark," was his decision.

It was now only about half-past three, and he shivered as he thought of having to stay out in the cold till then with wet clothing on.

"If I could find a house where the people were not curious, or where they are patriotically inclined, I would be able to be comfortable and get dry before night," he murmured.

Just then Dick heard the sound of chopping, and he listened a moment and then set out in the direction from which the sound came.

"I'll take a look at the man and size him up," was his thought, "and if I like his appearance I'll ask him to let me spend the rest of the afternoon at his home."

He walked onward boldly, for he did not much fear running upon any more redcoats, as he was going away from the encampment instead of toward it.

Louder and plainer sounded the chopping, and presently Dick came in sight of the chopper.

He paused and stared and gave utterance to a gasp of amazement.

The chopper was not a man, but a girl—a pretty, fresh-faced maiden of perhaps seventeen years. And she was wielding the axe with sturdy, vigorous swings that sent the blade deep into the tree at every stroke.

Dick gazed in open-mouthed amazement.

"Well, this beats me!" he murmured; "my! but she knows how to swing an axe!"

Just then there was a cracking sound and the tree began to slowly fall.

Over it came with a slow, majestic movement, and down it came with a great crash.

But in falling it had struck against another tree and been deflected from its course, and some of the limbs struck against the girl before she could get out of the way and knocked her down.

"She is dead!" exclaimed Dick, in horror-stricken tones. "She is crushed under the tree! This is terrible!—awful!"

CHAPTER III.

A JEALOUS LOVER.

Dick stood still as though rooted to the spot for perhaps ten seconds, and then he suddenly regained control of his faculties and rushed forward.

"Perhaps she is not dead after all," he murmured; "the main body of the tree did not strike her."

When he reached the spot he made the welcome discovery that the girl was conscious, and she did not seem to be injured at all, though she lay still and was making no effort to get up.

"Are you badly hurt, Miss?" cried Dick, anxiously.

"No, sir," replied the girl; "I am not hurt, but a limb has pinned my skirts to the ground and I cannot get up."

"Ah, I see," said Dick; "it is fortunate that the limb did not hit your body!"

"So it is, sir."

"I will get the axe and cut the limb off and free you."

"Thank you, sir. The limb is not very large and will be easy to cut off."

Dick searched around and found the axe, and then he went to work chopping at a point as far away from where the girl lay as was possible so as to obviate all danger of striking her with the axe.

It did not take him long to cut the limb off, and then he pulled the limb away, freeing the girl's skirts, and she rose to her feet.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. "I don't know what I should have done if you had not come to my assistance."

"Someone else might have happened along."

The girl shook her head.

"I am afraid not," she said; "this is an out-of-the-way point, and I am very much surprised that anyone was in the vicinity," and she gave Dick a rather searching glance. She gave a start and exclaimed:

"Why, your clothes are wet! How did it happen?"

"Why, I—that is, yes, I fell into the river," said Dick. He had started to say that he leaped into the river, but decided to be careful, and so said instead that he had fallen in.

The girl eyed him with a keen and penetrating glance.

"You have just rendered me a great service, sir," she said, gravely; "please do not hesitate to trust me."

"Certainly not, Miss," said Dick, with apparent frankness.

"I believe that you are a patriot," the girl said, quietly. "Tell me, is it not so?"

Dick looked at her questioningly.

"If such were the case and I were to acknowledge it, would it be safe and wise on my part?" he queried.

"Yes, indeed! I am a patriot, and so is my mother."

"And your father——"

"My father is dead," sadly. "He died when I was only ten years old."

"That is too bad."

"But mother and I get along very well. We have made a good living always. I work on the farm the same as father did, and I am unusually successful in raising a good crop."

"You are a brave girl!"

The young woman blushed.

"Oh, I like outdoor work and life," she said. "It agrees with me—don't you think so?" smilingly.

Dick noted her fresh complexion and rosy cheeks and her generally healthy appearance and nodded.

"Yes," he agreed; "I think it agrees with you."

"I prefer it to working indoors; but here I am keeping

you here talking when you must be wanting to get beside a warm fire! Come; we will go to my home at once. By the way," as they set out side by side, "you have not told me your name."

"My name is Dick Slater."

The girl had evidently never heard of Dick or the Liberty Boys, for she made no comment.

"My name is Gertrude Allison," she said.

They walked onward at a brisk pace, Dick carrying the axe.

Ten minutes later they came out in a clearing of about ten acres, at one side of which stood a good-sized log house. The smoke was curling up from the chimney, and Dick gave utterance to an exclamation of satisfaction.

"That looks good!" he cried.

"I have no doubt of it!" agreed Gertrude. "You must be cold!"

"Pretty chilly, Miss Gertrude."

As they approached, Dick noted that there was another clearing farther south, with a strip of timber perhaps fifty yards in width, between. This other clearing was larger, perhaps twenty acres in extent, and there was a log house visible at one side of it.

They reached the house presently and Gertrude opened the door and said to Dick:

"Enter, Mr. Slater."

The youth entered, and the girl followed and introduced Dick to her mother, who came out of the kitchen to see who had come in.

She greeted Dick pleasantly and thanked him for having rescued her daughter from her uncomfortable predicament—Gertrude having quickly told her mother the story of the accident of the falling tree.

"Oh, it was nothing, Mrs. Allison," said Dick. "She would easily have freed herself."

"At the expense of ruining my dress," said Gertrude, with a grimace; "and it takes work to weave the goods, Mr. Slater."

"I should think so," he said. "In fact, I know it, for I have seen my mother do the work many times."

Then they asked him about his mother, and he told them where he lived and about his mother and sister.

He had taken up a position in front of the huge fireplace and his clothes were rapidly drying.

The warmth was pleasing, and he felt comfortable, comparatively speaking.

He had been there only a few minutes, when there came a knock on the door.

Dick was startled.

He at once thought that he had been tracked by red-coats, and his hand dropped upon the butt of a pistol.

He took his hand away again quickly, however, for he remembered that the pistols had been soaked and the powder would be so wet that the weapon could not be fired off.

"No use to try to use my weapons," he thought.

Mrs. Allison had called out at once:

"Come in."

Then the door opened, and, to Dick's relief, a young man of perhaps twenty-one years stood there.

"Ah, George; come in," invited Mrs. Allison.

The young man entered, and, after greeting Mrs. Allison and Gertrude, he looked curiously and somewhat suspiciously at Dick.

"This is Mr. Dick Slater, George," said Gertrude; "Mr. Slater, this is Mr. Hilton, who lives in the house in the adjoining clearing. We have been neighbors for years."

There was a slight blush on the girl's face, and Dick at once leaped to the conclusion that the young man was her sweetheart.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Hilton," Dick said, cordially, and he extended his hand, which the other grasped, but without much showing of heartiness.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Slater," he said, coldly.

"I don't believe that you are," was Dick's mental ejaculation, and he at once guessed that the young fellow was jealous.

"Well, he needn't be," was Dick's thought; "Gertrude is a nice girl, and a pretty one, but I have a sweetheart up in old Westchester County, New York, and am not in the field at all."

CHAPTER IV.

GEORGE HILTON CARRIES NEWS TO THE BRITISH.

George Hilton did not stay long.

He seemed ill at ease while there and fidgeted about and watched Dick furtively. It was plain that Gertrude was ill at ease also, and that she was relieved when George rose and said he must be going.

"What is your hurry, George?" the girl asked, though it was evident from her tone that she was relieved.

"Oh, I've got to get back home and do some work."

Then he bade Dick good-by coldly and took his departure.

"I wonder what is the matter with George?" remarked Mrs. Allison, when the young man had gone; "he did not seem like himself at all."

"I didn't notice anything out of the way in his actions, mother," said Gertrude, but Dick noted that her face colored slightly.

"She knows that the young fellow is jealous," thought Dick.

George Hilton walked slowly to his home, his head dropped, his eyes on the ground.

It was plain that he was not feeling very happy, for there was a frown on his face and his brow was wrinkled.

"Slater—Slater," he mused; "where have I heard that name? Slater—Slater—ah, now I have it! I thought so! Dick Slater is the name of a famous rebel spy who has done great work in the North. He is the captain of a

company of young fellows known as the Liberty Boys of '76. I wonder if this can be the same fellow?"

George paused and stood still and glared at the ground as though he would force it to answer.

"Slater!—Dick Slater! That is not a common name, and I'll wager anything that he is the very same fellow, the rebel spy! Jove, if I was sure of it I would go up to the British encampment and tell them about him, for I believe that Gertie has fallen in love with him."

George was not a bad youth at heart, but he was of a jealous disposition, and in his present frame of mind he would be only too glad to see the young man at the Allison home taken prisoner by the British.

"It would put a stop to his fooling around Gertie," he soliloquized; "and—yes, I'll do it! I'll go to the British encampment and tell them about the fellow, and then perhaps they will come and take him in charge!"

George glanced around to see if he was observed, saw no one and turned and hastened away.

He made a detour and got around the Allison home, and then took to the road again and walked onward rapidly.

In a little more than half an hour he arrived at the British encampment.

He was challenged by a sentinel, and explained that he wished to see the British commander.

"Why do you wish to see him?" queried the soldier.

"I have some information for him."

"Oh, you have, eh?"

"Yes."

The sentinel hesitated a few moments, and then said:

"I'll summon the officer of the guard."

He did so, and when the officer got there he asked a few questions, which George answered frankly.

"Very well; come with me," the officer of the guard said; "I will conduct you to headquarters."

Ten minutes later George Hilton stood in the presence of General Cornwallis.

The British general eyed the youth searchingly.

"Your name?" he queried, curtly.

"George Hilton."

"You live near here?"

"Yes, sir; about two miles away."

"What is your business with me?"

"I have some information for you, sir; that is, I think that it may be of interest and value to you."

"What is the information?"

"I wish to ask a question, sir: Is there not a famous rebel spy of the name of Dick Slater?"

General Cornwallis started and looked at the young man keenly.

"Yes," he said.

"Well, do you know whether he is in the South at the present time?"

"No, I do not."

"He might be, though?"

"Oh, yes; Dick Slater is ubiquitous. He is always turning up in unexpected places and at unexpected moments.

It is quite possible that he may be in the South at the present time."

"I am sure that he is, sir. At any rate, I know where there is a young man of the name of Dick Slater."

"You do?" There was eagerness in the tones of the general's voice.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he?"

"At a farmhouse about two miles from here."

"Indeed? At your home?"

George shook his head, coloring slightly.

"No, sir," he replied; "at the home of a near neighbor."

"Ah!"

General Cornwallis looked thoughtfully at the floor, and then presently murmured:

"Yes, I'll wager that it is the original, genuine Dick Slater!"

He looked at George and went on:

"You will guide a party to the farmhouse in question?"

"Yes, sir," promptly.

"Very good."

Then the general gave a slight start as though a thought had struck him and said:

"By the way, did this young man that you speak of have on wet clothing?"

George started now, and a look of interest and surprise appeared on his face.

"He did!" he exclaimed. "When I saw him he was standing in front of the fireplace drying and warming himself."

General Cornwallis nodded and murmured:

"The same fellow, without a doubt! Yes, and he is Dick Slater, the original, genuine Dick Slater, I will wager!"

Then he lifted up his voice and called out sharply:

"Orderly!"

A few moments later the door opened and the orderly appeared.

"You called me, sir?"

"Yes. Orderly, go to Captain Shipley and tell him to come to headquarters at once."

"Yes, sir."

The orderly saluted and withdrew.

Perhaps ten minutes elapsed, and then the captain who had been in command of the party that had chased Dick and forced him to leap over the precipice in order to escape capture appeared.

He saluted, glanced curiously at George and then said to the general:

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, Captain Shipley; I have some work for you to do."

"What, sir?"

"You remember the young man who was chased by you and your men and who leaped over the bluff into the river this afternoon, of course."

"Certainly, sir; but this is not the young man in question," with a nod toward George.

"Oh, no; I know that. But he knows where the young man is."

"He does?"

"Yes, and he will guide you to the place."

"Then you want me to go and capture the fellow?"

"I do. And, Captain Shipley, don't make a failure of it, for the young rebel in question is no other than Dick Slater!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes; you will go at once?"

"At once, sir."

"Very good."

The captain saluted and withdrew, George, at the general's command, accompanying him.

The officer went to his quarters and selected ten men to go with him to capture the suspected rebel spy.

Then they set out, George leading the way as guide.

As they walked along the youth congratulated himself.

"Dick Slater will soon be a prisoner in the hands of the British," he mused. "And that will make it impossible for him to be where Gertie can see him, and then she will probably forget him. I hope so, anyway."

Three-quarters of an hour later the party of redcoats arrived in the vicinity of the Allison home.

George now stopped, and, pointing to the house, said to the captain:

"I don't want the folks there to know that I guided you to the house. I will stop here. You won't tell them that you had a guide, will you?"

"Certainly not," said the captain.

Then the soldiers strode onward, and a few minutes later had surrounded the house.

The captain advanced and knocked upon the door.

There was a brief wait, and then the door was opened by Mrs. Allison, who started and looked alarmed when she saw the captain and the soldiers.

"We have come for Dick Slater," said the captain. "Tell him to come forth and surrender, if you please, madam."

"He is not here, sir," was the reply.

CHAPTER V.

DICK ESCAPES.

The woman's voice trembled slightly and the captain's suspicions were aroused.

"I don't believe you, madam, begging your pardon," he said. "I feel sure that Dick Slater is here."

"No, sir, he is not."

"Where is he, then?"

"He—went away a little while ago."

The slight hesitation was noticed, and the captain became more suspicious than ever.

"You cannot deceive me," he said. "He is in the house, and I am going to find him!"

He motioned the woman to stand aside, and she did so. He then turned and addressed his men.

"Watch closely," he commanded, "and if the rebel appears seize him and make a prisoner of him. I am going in."

Then he stepped through the doorway, only to feel his throat seized by a grip of steel.

He attempted to cry out, but only a gurgling sound escaped his lips.

Then he grappled with his assailant and a struggle began.

A few words only are necessary in the way of explanation: Gertrude had discovered the presence of the British soldiers just as they were surrounding the house and had given the alarm. Dick had told Mrs. Allison to tell the British officer that he was gone, and she had done so. The Liberty Boy reasoned that the captain would enter to look for him, and he made up his mind to make a prisoner of the redcoat and thus be in a position to dictate terms to the soldiers outside, and he was now making an effort to overpower the British captain.

It was a fierce struggle, for the redcoat was a powerful man and made a hard fight.

Dick, however, was phenomenally strong, and he had secured his favorite hold. He was sure that it was only a question of a few minutes when he would have the other in his power.

But would the soldiers outside stand there and wait patiently, or would they become impatient and suspicious and enter to see what had become of their captain?

It was impossible to say.

The Liberty Boy could only use every effort to overpower his antagonist quickly and trust to his good fortune to be able to do this before an interruption came.

Mrs. Allison and Gertrude were greatly frightened. They stood there watching the struggle, their hands clasped and their faces pale. They feared that Dick would be overpowered, for the captain was larger and heavier, and looked to be much more powerful.

Dick caught glimpses of the faces of the two as he moved about in the struggle, and he said, reassuringly:

"Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Allison and Gertrude; I have him at my mercy, and will soon force him to succumb."

The captain struggled more fiercely than ever, but he could not keep it up, and presently he weakened and sank to his knees. He let go his hold of Dick and began pulling and clawing at the youth's hands with all his might.

He was in the throes of strangulation, and in less than half a minute after that he sank to the floor unconscious.

Dick quickly bound the officer's arms together behind his back, with a rope provided by Gertrude, and then he stepped cautiously to the door and looked out.

The door was open only a couple of inches, and Dick

was enabled to look out without being seen. The soldiers, he decided, were becoming restless.

"They will be coming in directly to see what has become of the captain," thought Dick, "and the question is, What shall I do?"

He thought a few moments and then motioned to Gertrude.

He led the way into the kitchen and to the back door, which was barred.

"I am going to go back into the sitting-room and imitate the captain's voice as nearly as possible and cry out for help, Miss Gertrude," explained Dick. "Then, when the soldiers come running in at the front door, I will make a dash out through this one. You be ready to unbar it as soon as you see the redcoats running around the house toward the front."

"Very well, Mr. Slater."

Dick knew he could depend upon Gertrude to do her work, and he hastened back into the sitting-room.

Another glance showed the soldiers still standing there, but they were looking somewhat anxiously toward the door and were moving their feet in a restless fashion.

"They'll come with a rush when I yell for them," was Dick's decision.

Then he lifted up his voice and yelled loudly, imitating the captain's voice as nearly as he could from the little he had heard it:

"Help! Help! Come quickly, men!"

Then he darted across the floor and into the kitchen, and at the same instant he heard the trampling of hasty feet on the front porch.

"I think they have all gone around the house," said Gertrude, in an excited voice.

She was taking the bar down as she spoke.

"I think you are right; good-by for the present, Miss Gertrude," said Dick.

Then he jerked the door open and leaped out of the house.

A flashing glance showed him that the redcoats were all gone.

It was Dick's opportunity, and he made the most of it. He dashed toward the timber at the top of his speed.

He was only about halfway there when the redcoats came running out of the rear doorway. They caught sight of him and gave utterance to yells of anger.

"Stop, or we will fire!" cried one.

Of course, Dick paid no attention to the command, but kept right on running.

Fearing that the redcoats really would fire upon him, he darted around the corner of the stable and got it between himself and the pursuing redcoats.

By the time they came around the corner of the stable, Dick was in the timber.

Seeing that the fugitive had a good chance to escape, the redcoats fired a volley from their pistols.

The bullets rattled around Dick at a lively rate, but he

was not hit, though one bullet cut through the sleeve of his coat.

He continued to run, and he dodged this way and that, taking advantage of the shelter of the trees as much as was possible so as to avoid being hit by bullets.

The redcoats fired another volley, but it was no more successful than the first.

Dick was a swift runner, and he steadily increased the distance between himself and his pursuers.

Captain Shipley, who had been freed from his bonds by one of the soldiers, had not yet recovered consciousness, so he could not join in the chase.

He was thus saved useless exertion, for half an hour later, when the captain had been conscious perhaps ten minutes, the soldiers returned with the report that they had been unable to overtake the fugitive.

"He escaped, eh?" growled the officer.

"Yes, Captain."

"Thanks to you, madam!" said the captain, glaring at Mrs. Allison.

The poor woman was frightened, and so did not make any reply.

"I suppose that that scoundrelly young rebel made you say that he was not here," the officer went on, speaking more as though he knew this to be true than to ask the question. "For that reason I shall not lay anything up against you," he went on. "And I shall be pleased to call and see you occasionally while the army is in this vicinity."

His eyes were on Gertrude as he spoke. There was admiration in their depths, and it was evident that he had been struck by the beauty of the girl.

"I—we—that is, we—do not—have much company," stammered Mrs. Allison.

"I am glad of that," said the captain. "You will be the more likely to be glad to see me."

Then he bade them good-afternoon and took his departure, accompanied by his men.

"I am sorry that young rebel escaped," the captain remarked, as they walked along; "but we'll get him yet. This does not end it by any means."

"We'll see about that!" murmured a youth who was in hiding beside the road and heard the captain's remark.

The youth was Dick, who, having discovered that the redcoats had given up the chase, had slipped back and had stationed himself where he could watch the front door of the house.

When the redcoats had disappeared around a bend in the road he stepped forth from behind the tree and made his way to the house.

CHAPTER VI.

GEORGE IS DISAPPOINTED.

George Hilton had stationed himself in the little strip of timber between his clearing and that of the Allisons, and

had watched the redcoats surround the house, serene in the belief that his supposed rival would soon be a prisoner.

When he saw Dick escape from the house with the redcoats after him, he still thought the youth would be captured, but when he saw the soldiers return fifteen or twenty minutes later without the fugitive, his disappointment was great.

"He has escaped!" he murmured; and then he turned and strode away toward his home.

He busied himself with chores till six o'clock, and then he ate his supper and put on his hat and went over to the Allison home.

He knocked, and presently Mrs. Allison opened the door, a look of alarm on her face. When she saw who the visitor was she exclaimed, in a voice of relief:

"Oh, it's you, is it, George? Come in."

He entered and took a seat in front of the fire, at the woman's invitation.

The youth glanced around and asked:

"Where is Gertie?"

"In the kitchen eating supper with Mr. Slater," was the reply.

George nearly fell off his chair.

"What!" he gasped; "you say—Dick—Slater—is here?"

"Yes," looking surprised.

"Why, I—thought that—he had gone—away!"

"The redcoats came and he had to leave to escape from them, but as soon as they went away he came back."

"Ah!"

So that was the way of it!

George realized that his work of going to the British encampment and telling about the presence of Dick Slater at the Allison home had been all for nothing. It had not resulted in his getting rid of his rival, after all.

"Won't you come in and have supper with us?" Mrs. Allison invited.

"No, thanks, I've had my supper," was the reply.

"You make yourself at home, then, George, while I finish my supper."

"Certainly, Mrs. Allison."

She went into the kitchen, closing the door behind her, and George glared angrily at the fire.

"Just to think that he has been here ever since the redcoats went away, and I thought he had been scared away for good and all!" the youth muttered. "Well, I did the best I could."

When Mrs. Allison re-entered the kitchen, she said:

"It's George."

"I thought that likely it was him," said Gertrude, coloring slightly and glancing at Dick.

The Liberty Boy said nothing. He was not surprised when he learned that the caller was George Hilton.

"I more than half suspect that he went to the British encampment and told them of my presence here," was his thought. "How else would they have known to come here and state that they had come for Dick Slater?"

He did not lay it up against George, however, for he realized that the young fellow was in love with Gertrude and was jealous, and so some such action on his part might be expected.

When he went into the sitting-room after supper was over Dick greeted George pleasantly, and no one would have suspected that he did not feel sure of the young man's friendship.

George felt that it was incumbent upon him to feign ignorance of the happenings at the Allison home, and so he asked presently, with as good an assumption of carelessness as he could muster, who had been firing pistol-shots in that vicinity.

"I was over in the timber to the southward chopping, and heard quite a number of shots," he said.

Dick did not doubt but what the youth knew all about the matter, but he explained, just as though he thought the young fellow was in ignorance, as he professed to be.

"And so the redcoats tried to capture you?" exclaimed George, pretending to be surprised. "Well, well! You were lucky to escape, don't you think?"

"Yes, I do."

It was soon quite dark out of doors, and Dick presently said that he must be going.

He bade the three good-by, shaking hands with them, and he thanked Mrs. Allison and Gertrude earnestly for their hospitality.

"You have been very kind to me and I shall never forget it," he declared.

They insisted that they had done nothing, but Dick refused to look at it in that light.

He said good-by again and then took his departure.

"Where is he going?" asked George, carelessly, as soon as Dick had disappeared.

"He is going to visit the vicinity of the British encampment, I think," replied Mrs. Allison.

Gertrude said nothing. She was aware of the fact that George leaned toward the king's side of the question, but she did not suspect that he would take an active part in the affair.

"So he really is the famous rebel spy, sure enough!" thought George.

He stayed only a few minutes after that. He said that there were some chores he had to do, and bade them good-night and took his departure.

But he did not go toward his home. Instead, he set out toward Hillsboro, where the British were encamped.

"I'll warn them that Dick Slater is spying on them," was his thought; "and then maybe they will be able to capture him."

He reached the edge of the timber, only to find himself confronted suddenly by Dick Slater.

"Where are you going in such haste, Mr. Hilton?" queried Dick, coolly.

CHAPTER VII.

A DISAPPOINTED YOUNG MAN.

It was not yet as dark as it would be later, and it was possible to see each other with tolerable distinctness. Thus Dick easily recognized George.

The young man was plainly disconcerted.

"I—ah—that is, I was—I'm on my way to—to look for some horses that strayed away," stammered George.

"Now see here, Mr. Hilton," said Dick, coldly and sternly; "you cannot deceive me, so there is no use trying."

"Deceive you! What do you mean?" The youth had regained his composure and spoke calmly enough.

"I mean that I know you were heading for the British encampment when I stopped you just now."

"Me heading for the British encampment?" in a tone of assumed surprise.

"Yes."

"Why should I go there?"

"You were going with the intention of warning them that I was coming there to do some spying."

George hastened to make denial.

"You are mistaken, Mr. Slater," he said. "I was not going to do anything of the kind."

"Don't try to deceive me; I know just what you intended to do. And I know, moreover, that you carried the news of my presence in the Allison home to the British, and thus caused me to come within an ace of being captured this afternoon."

"Y-you are mistaken," stammered George.

"No, I am not, and I know why you wished to cause me to be captured, Mr. Hilton."

"You—you know—why—why I——" stammered George, and Dick broke in, saying:

"Yes, I know why you did it. You were jealous of me, but I assure you that you made a mistake. I have a sweetheart of my own up in the North, so would not try to win yours. You did me an injury, or tried to, rather, for no reason at all."

"Then you don't care for Gertie?" eagerly.

"Why, no! I never saw her until this afternoon, and as I say, I already have a sweetheart, so you have nothing to fear from me."

George was silent a few moments and then said:

"I am sorry, Mr. Slater; I—I—beg your—pardon."

"Granted—providing you do not try to injure me in the future."

"I will not do a thing, Mr. Slater," earnestly. "I lean a little bit toward the king's side in this controversy, but not sufficiently to make me want to do anything to injure patriots. I was jealous of you, and that was the reason I carried information regarding you to the British. I would not have thought of doing so otherwise."

"All right; now go back home and leave me to do my work in peace."

"I will; and say, Mr. Slater, if there is anything I can do to help you I would be glad to do it, in order to make amends to you for the trouble I caused you this afternoon."

"There is nothing you can do. I hope that, if in future you take any hand in this war, it will be on the side of the people of America. I should think you would want to be free and independent."

"Well, I haven't thought much about the matter. But I do care a good deal about Gertie, and so when I thought you might be a rival I was willing to give information to the British. I won't do it again."

"Very well; good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Slater."

Then they parted, George going back in the direction of his home and Dick continuing onward in the direction of the British encampment.

Three-quarters of an hour later he was in the vicinity of the encampment.

He paused and took an observation.

He felt that he must be near the line of sentinels, and knew that he would have to be careful.

He wondered how he was to accomplish what he had set out to accomplish, viz., secure information regarding the plans of the British.

The more he thought of it and sized up the situation the more he realized that he was at work upon an almost impossible task.

It seemed an impossibility to enter the encampment, and, unless he could do that, he could not secure any information, he was sure.

Hillsboro was a small village and the British were encamped on the south side of it. After due deliberation Dick thought that he would be more likely to secure information by going around and entering the village. There was a possibility that he would find some British officers in the bar-room of the tavern.

Dick proceeded to put this plan into execution at once.

He made a detour and went around to the north side of the village. Here he paused and stood looking toward the little group of houses and wondering if he would be taking his life in his hands by venturing into the place.

"No matter if I am," was his decision; "I am going to find out something or know the reason why! General Greene had confidence enough in my abilities to send me, and I am not going to go back and tell him that his confidence was misplaced."

He strode toward the village.

He did not encounter any sentinels; those on the north side of the encampment were just at the south side of the village.

He made his way to the one tavern and looked in through the window.

Yes, there were some British officers in there!

Three officers were seated at a table in one corner of the room drinking and talking.

There were some common soldiers in the room also, but they were standing along in front of the bar. There were half a dozen citizens of the village present.

Dick wished that he might enter the room, but he felt that this would be taking long chances, for the citizens would know that he was a stranger, and if they told the soldiers this they would at once suspect that he was a spy.

Suddenly Dick heard a noise behind him, and before he could turn he felt himself seized by several hands.

He struggled fiercely, but to no avail. He was soon overpowered and his arms were bound together behind his back.

Sufficient light shone through the window so that Dick could see that he had been made a prisoner by a party consisting of four redcoats.

"Bring him on into the tavern," said one of the redcoats; "we'll let one of the officers question him. My own idea is that he is a spy."

"Hof course 'e's a spy," from another. "We caught 'im looking through the blooming window."

The four then conducted Dick into the bar-room and all turned to stare in surprise.

One of the officers, a colonel, rose and advanced, at the same time saying:

"Whom have you there, men?"

"I don't know, sir," replied one.

"Where did you find him?"

"He was outside looking through the window."

"Ah, that is suspicious!"

"So we thought, sir, and we decided to make a prisoner of him."

"We thought that 'e was likely ha spy, sir," from another.

"He looks like he might be a spy."

Then he turned his eyes upon Dick sternly.

"Who are you?" he queried.

"I live out in the country, sir," replied Dick.

"In what direction, young man?"

"To the westward, sir, across the river."

"How far west?"

"Five miles."

"What are you doing here in the village at this time of the night?"

"I came here to get some medicine, sir."

"You don't look sick."

"The medicine is not for me, sir; but for my father."

"Ah!"

The colonel regarded Dick sharply a few moments and then turned to the other two officers, both of whom wore captain's uniforms.

"What do you think about him?" he queried.

Both shook their heads.

"His story may be all right," said one; "but——"

"You doubt it, eh?" from the other.

"Well, these are troublous times, you know."

"That's right, and it won't pay to trust anyone, much less a total stranger."

"That's so."

"Why were you looking through the window?" the colonel asked, sternly.

"I heard voices as I was passing and looked in out of curiosity, sir."

"Humph!"

He pondered a few moments, and then again turned to the two brother officers:

"Do you think that we had better hold him prisoner?" he queried.

"Yes," replied one of the captains, promptly.

The other nodded assent.

"I think it will be best," he agreed. "If we let him go we might learn later on that he was one of the most famous rebel spies in the country."

"Yes," from the other; "it might be that he is the famous Dick Slater."

"That is not an impossibility," said the colonel. "I understand that the Liberty Boys are down in this part of the country."

"It would be a great haul for us if he really should prove to be Dick Slater, the famous spy!" laughed one of the captains.

"I think we will hold him a prisoner anyway," said the colonel, "and in the morning General Cornwallis can question him closely, and if he decides that the young fellow is not a spy, then that will be all right."

"That is my idea, Colonel," agreed one of the captains.

"Seat the prisoner over there in the corner," ordered the colonel, pointing to the corner back of where the table stood that he and the two captains had been seated at and where the two captains still sat. "I am not ready to return to the encampment yet, and we will take him along when we go."

"That is the idea," one of the captains nodded, approvingly.

Dick was conducted to a chair in the corner, and he seated himself without a word. He felt that the time had not yet come for him to make an attempt to escape.

The colonel resumed his seat at the table and called for another bottle of wine.

When it was placed on the table the three officers filled their glasses and began drinking and conversing, quickly forgetting, seemingly, that they had a prisoner.

Dick, having nothing else to do, listened to their conversation, and presently he became deeply interested in what he heard.

The officers, enthused by the wine, talked louder than they would otherwise have done, and Dick heard most that was said.

He was acquiring information, but whether it would do him any good was another question.

It certainly would not, unless he succeeded in making his escape.

And that would be difficult, he knew.

Still, he did not despair. He had been in many tight places since entering the army, and he was of a hopeful temperament, anyway.

Something might come up by way of a diversion, and then he might take advantage of it and make his escape.

He kept his eyes open and saw all that was going on in the room, as well as at the same time hearing what was said by the three officers.

All the inmates of the bar-room, save himself, were drinking, and the noise grew louder and louder.

Presently a citizen of the village and a British soldier got into a quarrel. They talked loudly and angrily, and soon attracted the attention of all.

Moreover, the liquor they had imbibed made them eager for anything, and the prospects of a fight between the two angry men was hailed with delight.

"Stop quarreling and go to fighting!"

"Yes, yes!"

"Don't talk so much, you fellows!"

"Do something!"

"I'll bet on the best man!"

The remarks of the spectators only aroused the two to a higher pitch of anger, and they got up and shook their fists in each other's face, at the same time telling what they would do.

"Well, do it, and don't talk so much about it!" cried one spectator.

"You're both afraid!" from another.

"No, one is afraid and the other doesn't dare!" declared a third.

Then there was a loud laugh.

"I can thrash you hand not 'alf try!" the British soldier declared, shaking his fist under the nose of the citizen.

"Ye kain't do nothin' uv ther kind!" retorted the citizen, belligerently, retaliating by shaking both fists under the nose of the redcoat.

"Hi can do it, by jove!" blustered the Briton.

"I dar' ye ter tetch me!" sputtered the citizen.

"Hi'll do worse than touch you. Hi'll smash you, that's what Hi'll do!"

"Jest smash me, ef ye kin! I dar' ye ter try et!"

"Go for him, Jerrold!"

"Yes, don't let the blooming Hamerican talk to you hin that fashion, comrade!"

"Give him a polishing off!"

These bits of advice, of course, came from the British soldiers.

"Go fur 'im, Jim!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A LIVELY COMBAT.

Dick learned that it was the purpose of the British commander to remain in the encampment where the army then was for a week or more, possibly longer.

"Ye kin lick 'im!"

"Don' let his red unyform skeer ye!"

"No, ye kin lick 'im, an' I'll bet on et!"

These remarks were from the citizens.

Dick, while not particularly interested in the quarrel that had been bred of the fumes of the liquor that had been imbibed, was nevertheless on the qui vive, for he fancied that the opportunity might be presented for him to make his escape.

"If the two blustering fools do get to fighting I may be able to slip out while the excitement and confusion is at its height," was his mental decision.

So he watched the progress of affairs with great interest.

He kept his eyes on the door and on the men standing between him and the door.

He also watched the colonel and the two captains, and noted, with satisfaction, that they were also interested in the would-be combatants. They were just at the point where they would take a delight in witnessing a fist fight between two men, and they would not care particularly who the men were.

Presently what Dick hoped would occur really did take place: Urged on by the remarks of his comrades, the redcoat struck the citizen a blow in the face.

It was not a hard blow, but it was sufficient to start the fight, and immediately the two were at it like wildcats.

They struck at each other as rapidly as possible and growled and threatened at a terrible rate the while.

The spectators were hugely delighted.

They urged the combatants on with all kinds of advice.

"Go it!"

"That's right!"

"Give it to 'im!"

"Knock 'is bloomin' 'ead hoff!"

"That's it! That's it!"

"I'll bet on the winner!"

Such were some of the remarks, and the two fought with increasing energy.

They gradually moved across the floor, the citizens giving ground, and the crowd moved slowly along after them, eager to see the fight at as close range as possible.

The three officers got up on the table and stood there looking over the heads of the intervening spectators.

They yelled advice, the same as did the common soldiers and the citizens.

Becoming more excited as the fight grew hotter and hotter, they fairly danced up and down on the top of the table.

Dick, who was watching affairs closely, decided that the time had come for him to attempt to make his escape.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him which would, if he could accomplish what he had in mind, make a diversion that would cover his movements nicely.

Turning his back to the table—he had risen and stepped up close to it—he caught hold of the edge, and then, ex-

erting all his strength suddenly, he turned the table over, sending the three officers headlong down upon and in among the spectators.

There was a crash as the table struck the floor, and wild yells from those upon whom the officers had alighted.

Then there was a grand mix-up, for the soldiers and citizens thought that the three had leaped down upon them purposely, and all made an attack on the three.

This started a free fight, for the citizens and soldiers were worked up to a high pitch of excitement by the fight anyway, and were eager to get at it themselves.

Dick at once seized upon the opportunity and walked across to the door. It was shut, but, by turning back, he managed to get hold of the knob and turn it.

Pulling the door open, he stepped through and out upon the porch, but as he did so the bartender caught sight of him.

"The prisoner is escapin'!" he yelled. "Hi, there! ye fools! The prisoner is escapin'!"

But the combatants paid no attention. It would have taken considerably more than such a statement as this to cause them to stop fighting, now that they had got fairly started at it. They were determined to fight it out.

Seeing that no one paid any attention to his words, the bartender started after Dick himself, but the youth leaped off the porch and ran with all his might, and the man, after reaching the outer air, stopped. Evidently he realized that he could not catch anyone who could run at such wonderful speed.

"Anyway, it's nothin' to me," he muttered. "And it serves the drunken fools right to lose their prisoner."

With this sage reflection he re-entered the saloon.

The battle was still raging with unabated fury, and it was evident that it would not stop till a lot of the participants were placed hors de combat.

"All right; let 'em fight it out," growled the bartender. "Only I hope they won't break up the furniture and things."

CHAPTER IX.

THE EXPLOSION.

Presently the melee came to an end.

The redcoat had thrashed the citizen, and the officers had finally gotten out from the midst of the combatants, and the combat itself was stopped as soon as the participants had become sobered up by a few sound thumps from the fists of their opponents.

One bright and ready-witted fellow suggested that they all take a drink together and forget about the encounter, and this suggestion was hailed with delight.

It was a popular suggestion.

They lined up along the bar and drank, not one drink, but three or four, and by that time the fact that nearly every one carried bumps, bruises or black eyes as a result

of the combat did not bother them at all; in fact, they had forgotten all about it.

But the officers, whose dignity had suffered along with their bodies, were not so easily mollified. They wanted revenge on somebody, but did not know who.

Then suddenly they remembered about the prisoner, and turned to look for him, only to find him gone.

"Where's the prisoner?" cried the colonel.

"You can't prove it by me," from one of the captains.

"He sneaked out while we were mixed up in the melee," from the other.

"We must catch him!" roared the colonel, starting toward the door.

"Yes, indeed!" from the two captains in unison.

"Beggin' your pardon, sirs, but you won't be able to catch him," said the bartender.

"Why not?" from the colonel.

"He's be'n gone a long time."

"He has?"

"Yes; he slipped out jest after you all got tangled up together."

"Why didn't you stop him?" angrily.

"I did try to."

"You don't mean to say you couldn't stop a man who had his arms tied together behind his back!"

"Yes; ye see, he was goin' through the doorway when I furst seen 'im, an' when I tried to ketch him he run like a deer. Say, I couldn' hev caught him nohow!"

"Blast the luck!" growled the colonel. "He upset the table and threw us in among the crowd on purpose to give him a chance to get away, I'll wager!"

"Did he upset the table?" in surprise.

"Yes."

"I s'posed that ye upset et yerselves."

"No, he did it."

"Well, he hain't enny slouch, I tell ye!"

"Oh, no; he is a very clever fellow. I'll wager that he is a rebel spy."

The officers, giving up all idea of trying to recapture the supposed spy, ordered more wine and started in on another drinking bout.

The soldier and the citizen who had fought were now on good terms again and were drinking together and vowing eternal friendship for each other.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, what of Dick?

He had run at top speed perhaps fifty yards, and then looking back and not seeing anyone coming in pursuit, he slackened his speed to a walk.

What should he do?

How was he to get his arms free?

He paused when he was out of the village and pondered the situation a few minutes.

At last he decided to return to the Allison home and get Mrs. Allison and Gertrude to free him.

Having decided, he set out at once.

He made a wide tour and then headed for the Allison home.

He reached there three-quarters of an hour later and knocked on the door.

Mrs. Allison's voice was heard, asking:

"Who is there?"

"It is I—Dick Slater."

The Liberty Boy heard exclamations from Mrs. Allison and Gertrude, and then the door came open.

"So you have come back?" the woman exclaimed, and then she caught sight of Dick's arms and cried:

"What is the matter? Why are you holding your arms behind your back?"

"They are bound there," replied Dick, smilingly, "and I have walked two miles or more to get you to free them."

Then he entered, and while they were untying the rope he told them how he had come to be in such a predicament.

"You had a narrow escape," said Gertrude.

"Yes, so I did," agreed Dick.

"You will stay over night with us, will you not?" Mrs. Allison asked.

"No," said Dick; "I will try my luck again and see if I can secure any more information regarding the intentions of the redcoats."

"You had better not do so, to-night!" said Gertrude; "they will be on their guard, will they not?"

"Oh, I don't think so. They will not be likely to think that I would make another attempt to-night, and that will be an advantage."

"True," the girl agreed. But she looked sober.

Dick remained only about a quarter of an hour and then bade them good-night and good-by and took his departure.

He made his way to the vicinity of the British encampment and then made the detour and approached the village from the opposite side from that on which was the encampment.

He was soon at the tavern, and again he peered through the window.

The three British officers and the redcoats were still in the tavern, and all were pretty thoroughly under the influence of liquor, and the majority were singing in a maudlin manner.

Suddenly, as Dick was standing there looking through the window, there came a thunderous explosion, and the Liberty Boy was hurled twenty feet.

He realized as he went hurtling through the air that the tavern had been torn to pieces by the explosion, he heard screams of terror, and then he struck—and knew no more.

CHAPTER X.

DICK REPORTS TO GENERAL GREENE.

When Dick regained consciousness he was lying on a blanket spread on the floor of a fair-sized room, and a woman was bathing his face with water.

He sat up at once and asked:

"What has happened?"

"There was an explosion," replied the woman; "the tavern blew up."

"Ah, yes; I remember now," said Dick. "Was anybody killed?"

"Yes, a number; and a number more were injured."

"That is bad."

"Yes, indeed."

"How came the tavern to blow up? Does anybody know?"

"Yes; the bartender went down into the cellar to open up a fresh cask of wine. There were several kegs of powder down there, and it is supposed that one of these was set off by the candle which he carried—though just how it happened will never be known, for the man is among the killed."

"Well, that is bad," said Dick. "But how came the powder to be there?"

"I understand that the British placed it there so that it would be kept safe."

"So that was the way of it, eh?"

"Yes; but where were you when the explosion came? In the tavern?"

"No; I was just going there."

"Well, you were lucky in not getting there sooner."

"So I was. But how came I here, and where am I, anyway?"

"This is one of the houses in the village. My husband and another man brought you here; they are now viewing the ruins of the tavern."

"I thank you for what you have done for me; but I am feeling all right now, and I guess I will go out and take a look at the ruins."

"Are you sure you are not seriously hurt?"

"Oh, yes; it was the concussion and the jar of the fall that made me lose consciousness."

Then Dick rose and left the house.

Not more than two hundred yards distant was a great crowd, and there were lanterns and torches burning which lighted up the scene.

He made his way to the spot and managed to work his way in to where he could get a good view of the ruins.

It was a terrible scene, for the tavern was torn to pieces and lay all jumbled up. Men were still at work looking for bodies which might still be buried beneath the debris.

There were hundreds of soldiers in the crowd, and practically all the men and boys of the village, and even some of the women.

Dick did not fear being suspected of being a spy, for the interest of all was on the scene before them.

Still, as there was nothing to be learned by staying here since all the talk would naturally relate to the blowing up of the tavern, he decided to take his departure and return to the patriot encampment beyond the Dan River.

He quietly worked his way out of the crowd and walked away.

Nobody paid any attention to him, and he was soon out of the village and making his way toward the spot where he had left his horse.

He found the animal still there and untied him and led him to the road, and, mounting, rode away toward the north.

It was a two-hours' gallop, and then Dick was challenged by a patriot sentinel.

"Halt! Who comes there?"

"A friend," replied Dick.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign."

Dick did so, and then rode on into the encampment and dismounted.

He looked after his horse, unbridling and unsaddling him, and then went to the quarters occupied by the Liberty Boys and rolled himself in his blanket and went to sleep. The other Liberty Boys were sound asleep and did not know Dick had arrived until they awoke in the morning.

They were delighted to see Dick, and made eager inquiries as to whether he had seen the British, etc.

"Yes, I saw them," was Dick's reply. "I'll tell you all about it after awhile, but first I must go and make my report to General Greene."

Immediately after breakfast Dick went to headquarters and was given a cordial reception by the general.

"You were not gone long, Dick," he said.

"No, sir."

"Did you learn the location of the British?"

"Yes, General Greene."

"Where is their encampment?"

"At Hillsboro, sir."

"How far is that from here?"

"About fifteen miles."

"Is it merely a temporary encampment, or do they intend staying there for a time—or did you learn anything regarding their plans?"

"I learned that much, at least. They intend to stay there a couple of weeks, at least."

"How strong an army has Cornwallis, anyway, Dick?"

"I should judge that he has two thousand men, sir."

"Two thousand, eh?"

"Yes."

"That is more than we have."

Dick knew that the patriot army numbered about fifteen hundred men.

He remained silent, and General Greene sat there, his eyes on the floor, evidently thinking hard.

Presently he looked up and said, as though speaking to himself:

"That is what must be done. Yes, I must get recruits till my army is twice as strong as at present; then I will give Cornwallis a battle."

The general then asked Dick some more questions and dismissed him.

A council of war was called, and General Greene and the members of the staff talked the matter over, finally

arriving at the decision that had been expressed by the general, that the army must be strengthened.

To this end parties were sent out in all directions to secure recruits.

The Liberty Boys went with the others, and for several days they were engaged upon this work.

Good success attended the efforts of the patriots, and at the end of ten days they had secured at least fifteen hundred recruits.

General Greene felt strong enough now to give the British battle, but it would be necessary to find out whether the redcoats were still at Hillsboro.

He summoned Dick and told him to go and reconnoiter the enemy at once.

The youth was glad to do this, as it was work that he enjoyed; and, too, he was eager to visit the scene of his adventures on his former trip.

He told the boys that he was going, and then bridled and saddled his horse and set out.

He started rather late in the afternoon and dismounted and left his horse in the timber at almost the same spot where he had left the animal the first time he visited that part of the country.

Dick decided to visit the Allison home the first thing. It was not yet dark, anyway, and he would not dare venture near the British encampment—if indeed the British were still encamped near Hillsboro.

He set out, and in less than an hour was at the Allison home.

"Oh, Mr. Slater, I am so glad to see you!" cried Mrs. Allison, when she opened the door in answer to his knock and recognized him; "I, that is, we—Gertrude and I—are in trouble, and perhaps you may be able to help us, at least with advice."

"I shall be glad to help you all in my power, Mrs. Allison; but what is the trouble?"

"Come in and I will tell you."

Dick entered and was given a warm greeting by Gertrude.

After a few minutes of conversation Mrs. Allison and Gertrude told Dick what it was that was worrying them. They said that Captain Shipley, the redcoat who had had command of the party that came to the house the afternoon he was there before to capture him, had been coming to call on Gertrude nearly every evening since then, and that he declared that he was passionately in love with her, and that she must become his wife.

"I hate him!" exclaimed Gertrude; "and I have told him again and again that I do not care for him and could not think of marrying him; but he laughs at me, and says that that is only a girl's whim, and that I will love him after we are married."

"I see," nodded Dick; "he is persistent and insistent, and will not take no for an answer."

"That is it exactly, Mr. Slater."

"And now what would you advise, Mr. Slater?" asked Mrs. Allison.

Dick looked thoughtful for a few moments and then said:

"The British army is still at Hillsboro, is it?"

"Yes," from Mrs. Allison.

"But the chances are that it will break camp and march away soon," said Dick; "and the bold captain will have to go along, and you will in all probability never see him again."

"I wish it might be that way!" said Gertrude.

"But I am afraid that it won't," from her mother. "He has threatened, Mr. Slater, that if Gertrude does not agree to marry him right away he will take her away and force her to marry him—and that is what is worrying us."

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed Dick. Then he looked at Mrs. Allison and then at Gertrude, and went on: "Does George Hilton know about this?"

Gertrude blushed and Mrs. Allison nodded and said:

"Yes, he knows about it."

"Then I should think you would have nothing to fear."

"The trouble is," explained Mrs. Allison, "that Captain Shipley has half a dozen men who are, I am sure, utterly unscrupulous, and they will do anything he says; so George would be helpless against so many."

"The odds would be rather heavy against him, true," agreed Dick.

"But he stands guard every night!" exclaimed Gertrude, her eyes shining; "and if they should try to carry me off some of them would get hurt!"

Dick nodded approvingly.

"I judge that you are right," he said; "but if there were six or seven of them he could not hope to get the better of them."

"That's it, Mr. Slater," from Mrs. Allison; "and I am afraid that they would kill George and carry Gertie off."

Dick looked sober.

"Perhaps the British may break camp and leave the region soon," he said; "and in the hurry of getting away the captain may forget to come here again or may not have the time to do so. He has to obey the orders of his superior officers, you know."

"Yes, but he may come here this very night and try to carry Gertrude off, unless she promises to marry him!" said Mrs. Allison.

"I'll be around here till after nightfall," said Dick, "and if the brave captain should come I will see to it that he doesn't put his plan into operation."

"Oh, thank you!" said Mrs. Allison. "I was going to ask you to stay and take supper with us."

"Thank you for the invitation, Mrs. Allison. I will enjoy eating a supper cooked by a woman."

Mrs. Allison and Gertrude went into the kitchen and began cooking supper, and presently George Hilton came into the sitting room and greeted Dick cordially.

"I happened to see you come," he said, "and so I came over as soon as I could to see you."

He and Dick understood each other now, and they discussed the matter regarding Captain Shipley.

"I have about made up my mind to shoot the scoundrel!" said George, his eyes flashing. "That would end it all and relieve Mrs. Allison and Gertrude of their worry."

"It would come very near serving him right," agreed Dick. "But he may come to-night and try to put his plan into operation, and if he does we will balk him."

"I shall be glad to have your help in case he does attempt to put his threats into effect," said George.

He did not stay long, as he said he had some more work to do.

Presently supper was ready, and Dick and Mrs. Allison and Gertrude sat up to the table and ate. Dick was hungry and ate very heartily, and this pleased Mrs. Allison and Gertrude greatly.

It was dark by the time they got through eating, and Dick went into the sitting-room and seated himself in front of the fire, while his hostess and her daughter were clearing up the table and washing the dishes.

They had just finished and had come in and taken seats when there sounded the trampling of feet on the porch.

Mrs. Allison and Gertrude turned pale.

"It's the captain and his men!" exclaimed the woman, in a hoarse whisper.

"What shall we do?" from Gertrude.

CHAPTER XI.

AN INTERRUPTED WEDDING.

"It may be that he will not go to the length that he has threatened," said Dick. "I will slip out of doors and see what he does. Don't let him know that I have been here."

Then Dick hastened out of the room and through the kitchen and out of doors.

He slipped to the corner of the house and peered around.

There were seven men standing there—redcoats. Dick recognized Captain Shipley, for it was not yet as dark as it would be later on.

Just then the door opened and Dick heard Mrs. Allison's voice say:

"Good-evening, Captain Shipley."

"Good-evening, Mrs. Allison," said the captain; "I have come to marry Gertrude."

"But, Captain Shipley, she doesn't want to get married," said the woman, her voice trembling.

"Well, I do; and she will be glad of it afterwards. Come on in, men."

They strode into the house and Dick heard the captain say:

"I have brought a chaplain along, and we will be married right here this very evening!"

"The impudent scoundrel!" was Dick's thought. "Well, we'll see if we can't put a stop to that!"

He turned and hastened toward the home of George Hilton.

He had just got through the strip of timber when he met George.

"Is that you, Mr. Slater?" George asked, as they drew near each other.

"Yes, George."

"What's up? Is Captain Shipley there?"

"Yes, and his gang is with him."

"Ah!"

"He has brought a chaplain along, he says—probably some man who is under obligations to him—and declares that the wedding must take place this evening!"

"I'll kill him first!" grated George.

"And I'll help you put the gang to rout, old fellow."

"Good! Let's go right over and go for them!"

"Very well; I see you have your rifle."

"Yes."

They walked rapidly in the direction of the house.

"Let's enter by way of the kitchen," said George.

"That will be best, I think."

They reached the door, which Dick opened cautiously.

The kitchen was empty, but the sound of voices came from the sitting-room.

The two entered and crossed to the connecting door, which was closed.

They listened, and soon got an idea of what was going on in the room.

"Here we are, chaplain," they heard the captain say; "we are all ready now, so tie us up tight and fast."

George's face grew dark, and he whispered:

"Let's go after them!"

"All right," said Dick. He drew a pistol and cocked it; then he suddenly jerked the door open.

There stood the redcoats, the captain well to the front, and he had hold of Gertrude's hands, while in front of them stood the chaplain, book in hand.

The redcoats caught sight of the two youths and gave utterance to exclamations of anger and amazement.

The youths did not hesitate an instant, but leveled their weapons, while Dick cried, sternly:

"Let go of the young lady's hands, you red-coated brute!"

"What's that!" roared the captain. "I'll have your heart's blood for that, blast you!"

He let go of Gertrude's hands, and she hastily moved away from him.

Seeing that there was to be a fight, Dick and George fired.

The captain and one of his men fell.

The officer was not killed, but was seriously wounded; the common soldier was dead.

The others started to draw their weapons, but Dick and George drew two more pistols and covered the redcoats, while Dick cried, sternly:

"Don't do it! We are deadshots, and if we fire two of you will go down dead!"

"Take those two and get out of here!" from George, nodding toward the forms on the floor.

Mrs. Allison and Gertrude, as pale as death, crouched in the corner as far away from the redcoats as they could get.

The British soldiers hesitated and exchanged glances.

"What shall we do?" growled one.

"Take—me—away from—here," said the captain, speaking with great effort and doubtless with great pain.

"All right, Captain," from one. And then to Dick and George: "We'll do as you say."

"All right," from Dick; "take them away from here, and be in a hurry about it!"

The redcoats made no reply, but one turned to Mrs. Allison and asked if she could let them have a blanket to carry the captain in.

"Yes, sir," replied the woman, glad that there was a prospect of getting quickly rid of the officer.

"And have you a spade about the place?" queried another. "Our comrade here is dead, and we may as well bury him at once."

"There is a spade in the smokehouse, sir," said Mrs. Allison.

"All right; bring the body along, a couple of you, while the others are fixing the hammock for the captain, and we will bury it."

Two seized hold of the corpse and carried it out of doors and to the edge of the timber. The third redcoat found the spade and joined them, and soon a grave was dug and the body interred and covered over.

Then the three returned to the house and found that the others were ready to start, the captain having been placed upon the blanket, the corners of which were knotted so as to make a good handhold for the soldiers.

Dick and George still stood there, pistols in hand—though Dick had, unknown to them, followed the three that had buried the dead man and watched them, thinking it possible that they might try to slip up and take George and himself unawares. The redcoats had not done so, however; the death of one of their number and the serious wounding of their captain had taken all the fight out of them. Then, too, possibly they thought that, as it was a private affair of the captain's, they were not called upon to risk their lives by offering to fight the two youths.

The captain was in considerable pain evidently, for he groaned dismally at frequent intervals, and when the soldiers lifted him off the floor he groaned worse than ever.

He was not so bad hurt that he could not talk, however, and he said as he was being carried out of the house:

"This—does—not—end this—matter! I shall—see you—all—again!"

"The best thing you can do is to consider this affair settled for all time," said Dick, quietly. "Next time you will get killed instead of merely wounded."

"That's right!" said George. "Don't ever come near this house again!"

The soldiers were getting their captain through the

door at this time, and they shook him around to such an extent that he could only groan with pain, and he did not make any reply to the words of the two youths.

When the redcoats had disappeared Mrs. Allison and Gertrude drew long breaths of relief.

"Oh, I am so glad that they are gone!" exclaimed Mrs. Allison.

"You got here just at the right time, George and Mr. Slater!" said Gertrude.

"It is awful!" said Mrs. Allison, with a shudder. She was thinking of the dead redcoat, doubtless.

"It was bad that we had to shoot the two men down right here in your home, Mrs. Allison," said Dick; "but it was absolutely necessary."

"Yes, I suppose so."

Then Dick said to the others that it was possible that the redcoats might attempt to play a trick, and that they might slip back and try to shoot George and himself.

"To make sure that they don't do it I will follow them," he said.

"You will be back, will you not?" Mrs. Allison asked.

"Possibly, though I am not sure that I will," was the reply. "And if I don't get back, why, good-by, and take good care of yourselves."

"We will," said George, "and you must do the same."

"I always try to do that," with a smile.

Then Dick hastened out, but he was careful to go out the rear way so as to avoid being seen by the redcoats in case they were still close to the house.

He could not hear or see anything of the redcoats, but he knew they could not be very far away, and as he knew the direction they would naturally go, he set out after them.

He was soon within hearing distance of the soldiers, and he grew gradually nearer till he could see them, though it was pretty dark now and he could barely make them out, a faint moving mass.

He soon became convinced that they had no intention of returning to the Allison home, but he decided to follow them anyway, in the hope that he would be able to secure some information.

The redcoats moved slowly, and it was not until an hour and a half had passed that the British encampment was reached.

Dick had learned from hearing the conversation of the redcoats as they moved slowly along through the timber that the British army would remain at Hillsboro another week at least.

He paused when the soldiers with their burden passed the sentinels and stood there pondering.

He hardly knew what to do.

It would be impossible to get into the encampment, and even if it were not, he would likely be captured if he ventured in, and so he decided that it would be as well to return to the patriot encampment with the information he had secured.

He did not lose any time, but turned and strode away.

Making a detour, he headed for the spot where he had left his horse.

Major was there, and Dick untied him, and a few minutes later was riding toward the patriot encampment across the River Dan at a gallop.

He arrived at the encampment without any adventure, and was soon rolled in his blanket and sound asleep.

Next morning after breakfast he went to headquarters and was given a hearty greeting by General Greene.

"Are the redcoats still in camp at Hillsboro?" the general asked.

"Yes, General Greene."

"Did you learn whether they intend staying there much longer?"

"I heard some soldiers talking, and they said that the army would be there another week."

"Humph!"

The general looked thoughtfully at the floor.

Presently he called his orderly and told him to summon the officers of the staff.

"Very well, sir," and the orderly withdrew.

Half an hour later the officers of the staff were gathered at headquarters.

General Greene then told them that the British army was still at Hillsboro, and he stated further that he had about decided to cross the Dan River and go down into that part of the country and offer battle, providing he could get a good position. He inquired what the officers thought of the plan.

They talked it over, and it was found that the majority were in favor of making the move.

"We must have a stronger force than the British commander has," said one.

"Yes, in so far as numerical strength is concerned," said General Greene; "but his soldiers are all veterans, while more than half our men are raw recruits, men who have never taken part in a battle."

"True," said one of the officers; "but they look like pretty good men, and I believe that they will give a good account of themselves in a battle."

"Well, I think so myself."

Then General Greene asked Dick a number of questions, the answers to which gave the officers of the staff a good idea of the situation and regarding the possibilities for making a successful campaign against Cornwallis and his army.

The discussion lasted a couple of hours, and at last it was decided to break camp the next day and cross the Dan River and proceed slowly southward.

"We will go slow and maneuver for position," said General Greene; "and if we can get General Cornwallis to make an attack on us when we are where we can take up a strong position we will likely be able to give him a thrashing."

All were in favor of this move, and then General Greene gave each of the officers instructions, after which the coun-

cil broke up, the members dispersing to their various quarters.

The soldiers were delighted when they learned that the army was to break camp and march southward. They were tired of camp life and the attendant inactivity.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CAPTURE OF THE DESPATCH-BEARER.

"The British don't seem to want to fight, Dick."

"So it seems, Bob."

"They know we are in the vicinity surely."

"Oh, yes; there can be no doubt regarding that."

"I supposed that as soon as we got down near them they would come out and offer us battle."

"I supposed so, too."

Several days had elapsed since the patriot army broke camp and marched across the Dan River and southward.

The patriot army was now within three miles of Hillsboro, but the British had not evinced any disposition to come forth and give battle.

And on this day of which we write Dick Slater, Bob Estabrook and half a dozen Liberty Boys were out on a scouting and reconnoitering expedition.

They had paused beside the road and were just within the edge of the timber.

At the point where they were the road was enclosed on either side by a rail fence.

Dick, Bob and the other youths talked along for perhaps twenty minutes, and then Bob suddenly uttered an exclamation:

"Yonder comes a horseman!"

"Where?"

"From the south, and he is a redcoat, too—a trooper."

"We must capture him!" exclaimed Dick; "perhaps he is a despatch-bearer!"

"That's so," from Bob.

"We will divide our party into two, and one will move up the road fifty yards and will step out and head him off, while the other will step in behind and make it impossible for him to retreat."

"That's a good scheme," said Bob.

He and three of the youths hastened away up alongside the road, while Dick and the other three youths remained where they were.

On came the trooper, evidently unsuspecting of danger.

He passed the spot where Dick and the three youths were concealed and rode onward, only to be suddenly confronted by Bob and the other three youths.

"Surrender!" cried Bob, in a loud, clear voice. "Don't try to escape or it will be the worse for you!"

The British trooper, seeing that he was headed off, turned his horse and dashed straight toward the rail fence at the roadside.

The horse was not a good leaper, and went down upon its knees, throwing the redcoat over its head.

The Liberty Boys of both parties dashed forward, and before the trooper could rise they had seized him and his arms were speedily bound together behind his back.

He was helpless, a prisoner in the hands of the rebels.

He had been jarred somewhat by his fall, but was not seriously injured, and he quickly regained control of his faculties.

He glared angrily and defiantly at his captors.

"Well, my fine fellow, we have you tight and fast," said Dick.

"What are you going to do with me?" growlingly.

"I am going to take you to the patriot encampment."

"You had better let me go!"

"Why so?"

"Because if you hold me General Cornwallis will wreak a terrible vengeance upon you!"

The Liberty Boys laughed.

"We are not afraid of Cornwallis," said Bob.

"You had better be!"

"Why doesn't he come out and fight us?" asked Dick.

"He will give you a fight in due time, never fear!"

"Well, we have been waiting several days for him to make some move of that kind, but he doesn't seem to want to do so."

"You will get all the fighting you want before many days," in a significant voice.

"All right," smiled Dick. "I judge that Cornwallis will get about all he wants at the same time."

Then he turned to the youths and said:

"One of you look through his pockets, and see if he has any papers. It is possible that he is a despatch-bearer."

"I'll see," said Bob.

He began feeling in the prisoner's pockets, and presently drew forth a sealed document.

"For Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton," he read aloud. "These are despatches, Dick!" eagerly.

"Undoubtedly, Bob."

"We have done well in capturing him."

"Yes, I think so."

Then Dick turned to the prisoner and asked:

"Where is Colonel Tarleton?"

"Don't you wish you knew?" said the trooper, sneeringly.

"Yes; you had better tell us."

"Never! If you want to know where Colonel Tarleton is you will have to find out yourselves."

"Perhaps we may be able to do so."

"Perhaps, but I doubt it!"

One of the Liberty Boys had caught the trooper's horse, and now he was assisted into the saddle and the youths set out for the patriot encampment, Bob leading the horse.

They reached there in about half an hour, and the prisoner was taken before General Greene.

"Whom have you here, Dick?" the general inquired.

"A despatch-bearer, sir," replied Dick.

The general was greatly interested at once.

"Say you so?" he exclaimed. "Where are the despatches?"

"Here, sir."

Dick drew the sealed document from his pocket and handed it to the general.

Taking the letter, the officer looked at the inscription.

"To Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton, eh?" he remarked. "I ought to secure some important, or at least interesting information from this."

He broke the seal, and, opening the letter, read the contents.

"Colonel Tarleton, with his troopers, is somewhere over toward the northwest," said General Greene; "and General Cornwallis has ordered him to come to Hillsboro at once, as he wishes to give battle to us and wishes to have his entire army."

"Say, General Greene," said Dick, eagerly; "let me take my Liberty Boys and go and get after Tarleton's band!"

"He likely has a much stronger force than yours, Dick."

"That doesn't matter."

"You are willing to see what you can do against him, anyway, eh?"

"Yes."

"Very well; you may go. But you may not be able to find him at all."

"We will have the fun for looking for him, anyway; and if we do find him we will do our best to deplete the ranks of his force somewhat and keep him from being in shape to render the assistance to General Cornwallis that he otherwise would be able to do."

The general told Dick that he would be glad if a blow could be struck the force under Tarleton, as that would help some, and the youth said that he would do his best to reduce the number in the colonel's band of troopers.

The Liberty Boys, when Dick told them what he was going to do, were delighted.

"Say, that is just the kind of work I like, Dick!" cried Bob Estabrook.

"Yah, und I vos lige dot kint uv vork, you pet me your life!" declared Carl Gookenspieler.

"It is afther suitin' me, begorra!" from Patsy Brannigan.

The other youths all said the same.

"Let's get ready at once, Dick!"

"Yes, let's go in a hurry, old fellow!"

"I want a chance at Tarleton!"

"So do I!"

"We will make him move lively if we get sight of him!"

Such were a few of the exclamations.

The youths at once began making their preparations.

They replenished their stocks of ammunition, recharged their pistols, filled their saddle-bags with provisions and then bridled and saddled their horses and set out.

They rode toward the west in the hope that they might be able to head off Tarleton and his band in case they were

on their way to rejoin the main British army at Hillsboro.

CHAPTER XIII.

ATTACKED BY TARLETON'S BAND.

"There they are, Dick!"

"You are right, Bob."

"Jove, Tarleton has a strong force, hasn't he!"

"Yes; stronger than I expected."

"He has four hundred men at least!"

"That is just about the way I size the force up."

"Four times as many as we have!"

"Yes, it is odds of four to one if we engage him in battle."

"If? did you say, Dick?"

"Oh, we'll go for them, Bob!"

"That sounds better!"

"We must try to get them at a disadvantage, however, if possible, so as to counterbalance the excess of numbers against us."

"Yes, that will be policy, if we can manage it."

"We will wait till they go into camp to-night. They may choose a position that is not over strong, not thinking that danger is at hand."

"True; it is possible that they may do so."

Dick and Bob were out in advance of the Liberty Boys' force and were reconnoitering and scouting. Having come to the top of a hill they paused there and were looking all around, when they suddenly caught sight of a large party of troopers coming toward them from the northwest.

The troopers wore brilliant scarlet uniforms, and there could be no doubt but what they were the force under Colonel Tarleton, who was known as "The Butcher," because of the fact that he had been reported as having massacred a force of patriots, giving them no quarter.

The Liberty Boys had heard about this, and it made them all the more eager to get after Tarleton's force.

They would be glad to strike him a strong blow.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Dick and Bob caught sight of the redcoats, and they judged that the enemy would go into camp soon.

The British troopers were coming along at a leisurely pace. They did not seem to be in any hurry.

Dick gauged their speed and then looked toward the south.

"They will come to a stop and go into camp yonder at the foot of the ridge, Bob, I'll wager," he said, pointing.

Bob nodded.

"Likely enough, old fellow," he agreed.

"And that will be all right, eh, Bob?"

"Yes, I think it will enable us to get a good chance at them."

The youths waited till the British troopers were within

a quarter of a mile of them, and then they moved away toward the south.

They took up a position at last on top of the ridge and waited.

The British troopers came in sight presently, and as Dick had prognosticated, they went into camp at the foot of the ridge, where a small stream wound its way toward the Neuse River.

The troopers unbridled and unsaddled their horses, put up their tents and built campfires.

"They are getting ready for an all-night stay, Bob," said Dick.

"Yes."

"That is good!"

"So it is."

"Let's slip down the slope and get as near the camp as possible."

"All right."

"I want to see the lay of the land by daylight, so that we will be better able to get to them after dark."

"Yes, that will help."

They slipped down the slope and managed to get to within one hundred and fifty yards of the edge of the encampment without being in danger of being seen.

Here, ensconced behind trees, they stood and looked the ground over and eyed the camp and the troopers so busily engaged in cooking their supper.

They remained there perhaps half an hour and then turned and stole back up the slope.

They then proceeded to the point where they had left the Liberty Boys.

The youths inquired eagerly regarding whether they had seen anything of the redcoats.

"Yes, we have seen them," said Dick.

"Good, good!"

"Hurrah!"

"Now we can make an attack on them!"

"Are they far from here?"

"Will we strike them to-night?"

Such were a few of the exclamations and queries uttered by the Liberty Boys.

"Yes, we will make an attack on them to-night," said Dick.

This was pleasing news.

The Liberty Boys were eager to have a fight with the British troopers.

They had not been engaged in a battle since that of the Cowpens, and they felt that they were getting rusty, so to speak.

They cooked and ate their suppers and then waited patiently for the order to march.

Dick had decided to leave the horses where they were under the charge of a couple of the youths and the others would go to make the attack on foot.

At last, about half-past nine, he gave the command for the youths to start.

They at once set out.

Dick and Bob were in the lead, of course, as they were not only the commanders of the party, but they were the only ones who knew the way to where the redcoats were encamped.

They did not go fast, as it was not necessary.

After a walk of half an hour they began climbing the slope leading to the top of the ridge.

When they reached the top they paused and rested a few minutes and looked down at the campfires of the enemy, these being visible, the growth of timber on the slope being not very heavy.

Presently Dick gave the command for the youths to move down the slope.

They obeyed the command and moved slowly and cautiously downward.

When they were within two hundred yards of the edge of the encampment they paused.

They were close up to the sentinels and could not advance farther without being discovered.

Dick decided to wait awhile before making the attack.

If the troopers lay down and went to sleep it would give the youths a better chance to do good execution.

They had been standing there behind trees gazing down at the encampment perhaps fifteen minutes, when Bob moved across to Dick's side and said in a cautious whisper:

"Say, Dick, I have just made a discovery."

"What is it, Bob?"

"Why, there are a goodly number of the redcoats missing from the encampment!"

Dick did not make a reply at once, but gazed searchingly down into the encampment.

"Jove, Bob, I believe that you are right!" he suddenly exclaimed, in a whisper, of course.

"How many are missing, do you think?"

"More than a hundred, Bob."

"That's what I think."

"Yes."

"What does it mean?"

"I am inclined to think that it means danger for us, old fellow!"

"Do you think so?"

"Yes."

"You think that they have learned of our presence in the vicinity?"

"It would not surprise me. They may have sent out scouts to reconnoiter, and these may have discovered us."

"And in that case the redcoats who are missing from the encampment may be preparing a surprise for us."

"That's so!"

At this moment came in a loud, clear voice from over to the right:

"Fire! Give it to the rebel scoundrels!"

Then loudly a volley rang out.

Crash!—roar!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LIBERTY BOYS RETREAT.

The bullets rattled all around the Liberty Boys.

Fortunately they were youths who understood what to do under most all circumstances, Dick having given them lots of instructions regarding how to act and what to do under certain contingencies; and now, the instant they had heard the command to fire, they had thrown themselves at full length on the ground.

The bullets from the muskets of the redcoats, of course, went above the Liberty Boys.

Not a single youth was hit.

The redcoats gave utterance to wild yells, and the command was heard:

"Charge, men! Bayonet the rebels!"

From down in the encampment came the sound of yells.

But the Liberty Boys did not intend to let the redcoats have it all their own way.

They lay extended on the ground and leveled their muskets and fired a volley.

They must have done some execution, for on the air rose screams of pain and groans.

"Now with the pistols!" commanded Dick.

The youths drew their pistols and cocked them.

The redcoats were coming, the youths knew, for they could hear them rustling through the underbrush.

Guided by these sounds the Liberty Boys fired two pistol-volleys.

They did good execution, if the groans and screams of pain were anything to judge by.

Then from the encampment below came wild yells, and the youths knew that the main force of redcoats was coming up the slope.

Dick gave utterance to a peculiar, quavering whistle, and the Liberty Boys understood that they were to retreat back up to the top of the ridge.

They did so, moving as rapidly as possible, and here they paused and reloaded their muskets and pistols.

Halfway down the slope could be heard the voices of the redcoats, and it was evident that those who had made the attack on the Liberty Boys were explaining things to those from the encampment.

"What are we going to do, Dick—make a stand here?" asked Mark Morrison.

"Yes, Mark; we will give them another fight if they come on up," said Dick.

"Good!"

This suited the other youths also.

"Let 'em come!" said Bob; "we'll make 'em wish they had stayed back in the encampment."

They listened and learned by the sound of the voices that the redcoats were coming up the slope.

It was evident that they were moving slowly, however.

"They know that we can fight some now," chuckled Bob.

"Yes, they certainly know that," agreed Dick.

Closer and closer came the British.

Then suddenly on the air rose a shrill whistle.

It was the signal from Dick for the Liberty Boys to fire.

They obeyed instantly.

Loudly the volley rang out.

The British must have felt the effects of the storm of bullets, for yells of pain and anger went up.

"Fire!" screamed an officer. "Give it to the scoundrelly rebels!"

Crash! Roar!

The volley followed the command closely.

Bullets whistled all around the Liberty Boys.

They had taken the precaution to throw themselves down upon their stomachs again, however, and only two or three were wounded, and these not seriously.

"Now with the pistols!" cried Dick. "Let's kill every last one of the redcoated rascals!"

A cheer went up from the throats of the Liberty Boys.

The youths possessed splendid lungs, and so great was the volume of the cheer that the redcoats were deceived, thinking that the party they were opposed to must number at least two hundred.

This was more than they had bargained for.

They had not thought that the rebels numbered more than fifty or seventy-five.

The youths at once fired two pistol-volleys.

Crash! Roar! Rattle!

Crash! Roar! Rattle!

On the air rose screams of pain and yells of anger, and then came the command:

"Charge, men! Their weapons are empty now and we can bayonet them to death!"

"Don't you believe that!" cried Dick. "We have our belts full of pistols, so look out for us!"

But the redcoats evidently did not believe this, for they came with a rush, as the Liberty Boys could make out by the noise made by their feet on the rocks and gravel.

Dick gave utterance to another shrill whistle.

Again two pistol-volleys rang out, one close on the heels of the other.

The British must have been dismayed by the hail of bullets, but if so they did not permit it to overmaster them, for they kept on coming.

"At them, men, and give no quarter!" roared a voice, and the Liberty Boys guessed that it was the famous Tarleton who had uttered the command.

Dick felt that it would be bad policy to permit his Liberty Boys to meet the redcoats in a hand-to-hand combat; the enemy outnumbered them greatly, and in encounters at close range force of numbers would undoubtedly prevail; so he gave the signal for the youths to retreat.

They did so, though the majority would have preferred to remain and fight the enemy hand-to-hand.

When the blood of the Liberty Boys was up they were ready to fight a regiment.

Odds signified nothing to them.

But Dick was always cool and clear-headed, and he never permitted his Liberty Boys to do anything foolishly reckless.

He was willing to fight desperately, if it was absolutely necessary, against any odds; but if he could get out of the way when confronted by an overwhelming force he preferred to do so and wait for a more favorable opportunity for renewing the battle.

So down the slope of the ridge the Liberty Boys retreated rapidly, but in good order.

CHAPTER XV.

GENERAL GREENE CHALLENGES CORNWALLIS.

"Well, Dick, what are we going to do now?"

"I hardly know whether to return to the encampment or try to get another chance at the redcoats, Bob."

"The latter, by all means!"

"But we may not be able to do so."

"Well, we can try."

"So we can."

"Let's do it, Dick," said Sam Sanderson.

"Yes," from Mark Morrison; "we have had splendid luck in the encounter just ended."

"That is true."

"We haven't lost a single one of our boys, and only five are wounded, and they not seriously."

"That's right. Well, we will have another try at the redcoats."

"I think it a good plan to do so, Dick," said Bob; "you see, they will not think of such a thing as that we would make another attack to-night, and so we will be able to take them by surprise."

"It is settled then," said Dick. "But we will make a wide detour and come around and approach their encampment from the lowland to the west."

"All right; that will be a good scheme."

The other youths all thought so, too.

So the Liberty Boys set out.

They made a detour and went around and approached the British encampment from the west.

They could see the redcoats in the encampment plainly, for they had built up the campfires, and the work of dressing the wounds of the injured was in progress.

The Liberty Boys found, however, that the British troopers had become cautious, for a line of pickets was stationed at a point more than a third of a mile from the edge of the encampment.

The youths paused and discussed the situation cautiously, so as not to let the pickets know that an enemy was near.

It was decided, after some discussion, to make a sudden dash, drive the pickets in, and then rush up to within musket-shot distance and fire upon the troopers and then retreat.

When it had been decided the youths were eager for the word.

Muskets in hand, they awaited the signal.

Presently Dick gave it, a low, quavering whistle.

Instantly the Liberty Boys leaped forward and ran as fast as they could.

The pickets heard them coming and fired in the direction from which the sound came; then they took to their heels and ran toward the encampment, yelling at the top of their voices:

"The rebels! The rebels are upon us!"

All was excitement in the British encampment at once.

The troopers seized their muskets and fired a volley into the darkness, but the Liberty Boys were out of range as yet.

In they rushed, however, and presently they were close enough to do effective work, and Dick gave the signal to fire.

The youths fired a volley at once.

They did pretty good execution, dropping quite a number of the redcoats.

They saw the British troopers level their weapons to fire another volley and threw themselves forward upon their faces.

The British fired, but the bullets went above the youths, inflicting no damage.

The Liberty Boys were within pistol-shot distance now and they fired two volleys, after which they rose and quickly retreated.

"Charge them, men!" they heard the voice of the commander cry.

The British came rushing toward the spot where the youths had been, but they did not find the rebels, and presently stopped and gave up the attempt.

The Liberty Boys now made their way back to their encampment.

They knew that it would be useless to try to strike the British another blow that night.

The rest of the night was spent quietly, the Liberty Boys getting a sufficient amount of sleep.

Next morning they hastily ate their breakfast, and then Dick and Bob went and reconnoitered.

They learned that the British troopers were on the move.

"They are going to join Cornwallis at Hillsboro, I'll wager, Dick," said Bob.

"I think it likely, old fellow," was the reply.

"Can't we worry them as they go along?"

"We can try it, at any rate."

They did more than try; they succeeded in worrying Tarleton and his troopers greatly as they rode onward toward Hillsboro.

The youths managed to kill three or four of the enemy

and wound several, and they felt that they had done very good work.

The Liberty Boys kept after the troopers till they were almost to the main British encampment.

Then they finally stopped and turned back.

They rejoined the main patriot army, and Dick went and reported to General Greene.

The general was glad to hear that the Liberty Boys had had such good luck.

"Every trooper that was killed or incapacitated for fighting makes just one less that we will have to fight against when the battle takes place," he said.

"That is the way I look at the matter," said Dick.

General Greene held a council of war, and it was decided to venture down to within a mile of the British encampment and go into camp, in the hope that the British would make an attack.

A strong position was chosen.

Then General Greene wrote a note, addressed it to General Cornwallis, and summoned Dick Slater and told him to carry it to the British encampment under the protection of a flag of truce.

Dick said he would do so, and, taking the note, he set out.

A British captain came forth to meet him, and inquired what was wanted.

"I have here a note for General Cornwallis from my commander," said Dick.

"I will take it to him," said the captain.

"Do so."

"Will there be an answer, do you think?"

"I think so."

"Then you will wait here?"

"Yes."

"Very well."

The British captain turned away and hastened to the British encampment and handed the note to General Cornwallis. He opened it and read:

"To General Cornwallis:

"I am encamped within a mile of you. Come and fight me.

GENERAL GREENE,

"Commander Patriot Army."

General Cornwallis wrote underneath, on the same paper:

"To General Greene:

"You will soon have all the fighting you want, never fear.

GENERAL CORNWALLIS,

"Commander British Army."

He handed the note to the captain and said, curtly:

"Take that to the messenger."

The captain bowed and returned to where Dick was in waiting and gave him the note, with instructions to hand it to General Greene.

"I will do so," said Dick, and then he returned to the patriot encampment and gave the note to General Greene, who read the words written by General Cornwallis and smiled grimly.

CHAPTER XVI.

CAPTAIN SHIPLEY BEATEN AGAIN.

That evening Dick got permission and left the encampment and made his way to the Allison home.

He was given a hearty welcome by Mrs. Allison and Gertrude.

"Well, how are you getting along?" queried Dick, after he had taken a seat in front of the great fireplace.

"Oh, we are getting along all right," replied Gertrude.

"That is good. Have you heard anything more from Captain Shipley?"

"No, sir."

"Possibly he is dead."

"It is possible."

Just then there came the sound of footsteps on the porch and the door opened and George Hilton entered.

"Well, well! How are you, Mr. Slater?" the youth greeted.

"I am getting along all right," was Dick's reply. "How is it with you?"

"Oh," with a quick glance at Gertrude, "I am as happy as the day is long."

"I'm glad to hear that."

George took a seat and the four engaged in conversation.

Dick asked the young man if he had heard anything further from Captain Shipley, and he said that he had not, unless a notice that he had received only an hour before was from him.

"A notice! What kind of a notice?" exclaimed Gertrude.

"Here is it," said George, drawing a piece of paper from his pocket and handing it to Dick. "Read it aloud, Mr. Slater."

Dick unfolded the paper and read:

"To George Hilton:

"Stop visiting Gertrude Allison. Obey this command or die!

From

"ONE WHO MUST BE OBEYED."

The four exchanged glances of wonder and amazement.

"That is rather a queer warning," said Dick.

"That sounds a bit like the captain, don't you think so?" from George.

Dick nodded.

"You are right," he agreed.

Young Hilton's teeth came together with a click and he said, grimly:

"Well, if Captain Shipley, or anyone else, thinks he can frighten me he is badly fooled!"

Gertrude looked at George with an expression of pride on her face, but there was anxiety there also, and she said:

"You will have to be on your guard, George. You are in danger, I fear!"

"I'll be on my guard, Gertie; but the other fellows are in danger, too, if they try to do me injury."

"They may not give you any chance, George," said Dick.

"That is true," said Mrs. Allison; "they may take you unawares."

"I won't let them."

"Oh, you won't, eh?"

These words were spoken in a cold, sneering tone by Captain Shipley, who at that moment opened the door and stepped into the room. In his hand was a pistol, and it was aimed straight at the heart of George Hilton.

Behind the captain were at least a dozen redcoats, all with drawn pistols.

Dick and George realized that it was useless to attempt to resist. It could only result in their being shot dead.

Mrs. Allison and Gertrude sat motionless, and they were as pale as death.

They feared that the two young men would be put to death.

"We have you this time, I think!" said Captain Shipley, grimly.

Then he ordered the two to raise their hands above their heads.

They did so.

It would have been folly to refuse.

"That is sensible," nodded the captain. Then he turned to his men and ordered a couple of them to disarm the two and bind their arms.

This was quickly done.

"There," said the captain, with a smile of satisfaction; "I guess that now the game is in my own hands."

"For the present it may be," said George; "but there will be a reckoning later on, never fear!"

"Oh, I never fear," with a chuckle. "I am fearless, in fact. It is my way."

Then he turned to one of the men and said:

"Chaplain, we will now have that ceremony that we were about to have here once before, but which was interrupted by these two young scoundrels."

Dick and George recognized the man thus addressed as being the same one that had been there with the captain before.

"All right, Captain," said this man. "I'm ready if you are."

The captain strode across the room and seized hold of Gertrude's hand and dragged her rudely out upon the floor.

"We're going to be married, Gertrude," he said, with a smile of triumph. "You know our wedding ceremony was interrupted the other time, but it won't be this time."

George Hilton was pale as death, and he pulled at his bonds like a madman and glared at Captain Shipley with a look of hatred.

"You must not do this, Captain Shipley!" exclaimed Mrs. Allison. "A marriage by force is an outrage."

"I refuse to marry you, and will not say yes to any of the questions, so that will make it no marriage," said Gertrude.

"It won't make any difference; you will be married just the same, for the chaplain will make out the certificate and it will be signed by witnesses. You see?"

A groan escaped the lips of Gertrude, and an exclamation of rage was given utterance to by George Hilton.

"As sure as that the sun rises in the morning I will kill you, Captain Shipley, if you persist in going through with this affair!" the young man declared.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the captain. "That is brave talk from one who is a helpless prisoner. I will see to it that you don't get any chance to injure me, young fellow."

"You are about the biggest scoundrel that it has ever been my ill-fortune to see!" said Dick, eyeing the captain scornfully.

The officer glared at him.

"See here, Dick Slater," the captain growled; "this is no affair of yours, and I should think that you have trouble enough of your own without worrying about the troubles of other people."

"These people are my friends," was the quiet reply.

"Well, you won't be able to help them any, friends or not friends."

"That remains to be seen."

The captain laughed.

"What do you think you can do?" he queried. "You are a helpless prisoner, and the ceremony is going to take place within the next ten minutes."

"It won't be legal."

"Bosh! Yes it will."

"You know it will not, Captain Shipley!" cried George.

"Oh, shut up, young fellow. Chaplain, are you ready?"

"Ready, Captain."

"Very good; go ahead with the ceremony."

Just at this moment, however, and before the chaplain had uttered a word there came the sound of pistol-shots from without, followed by wild yells from the redcoats who were standing on the porch.

An exclamation of rage escaped the lips of the captain.

"What does it mean?" he cried.

"We are attacked by a strong force, Captain!" cried one of the soldiers; "flee for your life!"

Captain Shipley and the chaplain darted into the kitchen and out through the doorway at the rear and took to their heels.

The other redcoats leaped off the porch and fled also.

There were some more pistol-shots, and presently Bob Estabrook and a couple more of the Liberty Boys appeared in the doorway.

"Bob!" exclaimed Dick, "how happens it that you are here?"

"General Greene is going to make an attack on the British to-night, Dick," was the reply; "and he sent us to bring you back to the encampment so as to be there in time to go with us."

"Did only you three come?"

"No, there are about twenty of us. The others are chasing the redcoats."

"Ah! Well, cut our bonds, Bob."

The youths obeyed, and soon Dick and George were free.

It was the first time that George had met Bob and the other two Liberty Boys, and Dick introduced them to him and to Mrs. Allison and Gertrude.

"Oh, but your friends came at just the right moment!" murmured Gertrude.

"So they did," agreed Dick; "and I was not looking for any such good fortune to happen to us, either."

Presently the other Liberty Boys put in an appearance, and they reported that they had chased the redcoats into the timber and had wounded three or four of them.

Dick then explained to George and Mrs. Allison and Gertrude that he must go at once with the Liberty Boys, after which he bade them good-night and, in company with his comrades, set out in the direction of the patriot encampment.

"How did you manage to find the Allison home, Bob?" Dick queried, as they walked along.

"I remembered what you said about its location. You know, I am a pretty good woodsman, Dick, and can find my way anywhere almost."

"Yes, I know that; well, I am glad that you got there just when you did."

Three-quarters of an hour later they arrived at the encampment, and they found the army ready to set out to make the attack on the British.

The Liberty Boys took their places in the ranks and then the command came for them to march, and the army set out.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BRITISH DISAPPEAR.

The patriots made an attack, but the night was so dark that they could not see to do much damage, and so after an hour of firing the order was given to retire.

The soldiers obeyed and marched back to their encampment.

"We will make an attack in the morning by daylight," said General Greene.

The soldiers threw themselves down upon their blankets and got as much sleep as was possible.

They were up before daylight and had eaten breakfast by the time the sun was illuminating the eastern sky.

General Greene sent Dick to reconnoiter the British encampment.

The youth made his way to the vicinity of the encampment, only to make a discovery:

The British were not there!

They had evacuated and gone away.

But where had they gone?

That would have to be learned by scouts later on.

Dick's business now was to get back and carry the news to General Greene.

He hastened away in the direction of the patriot encampment and was not long in reaching there.

He hastened to the general's tent at once.

"Well?" said General Greene, eyeing Dick eagerly. He could see that the youth was excited and expected to hear some news of importance and interest.

"The British are not there, sir!" exclaimed Dick.

"What!"

General Greene stared in amazement.

"The British army has taken its departure, sir!"

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, sir."

"Where has it gone?"

"I don't know."

"You saw nothing of it, then?"

"No."

"Well, take a helper or two and go and scout around till you learn where the British have gone, Dick."

"Very well, sir."

"Bring me the news at the earliest possible moment."

"I will do so, sir."

Dick saluted and withdrew.

When he told the Liberty Boys that the British army had disappeared they gave utterance to exclamations of surprise and disappointment.

"That is bad!"

"Yes, we won't get to fight them to-day."

"Where have they gone?"

"They're afraid to risk a battle with us!"

Such were a few of the exclamations.

"Bob, you and Sam come with me," said Dick.

"What are we going to do?" from Sam, eagerly.

"We are going to scout and reconnoiter till we learn where the British have gone."

"Good!" said Bob. "That kind of work suits me. Let's start at once."

They set out a few minutes later.

They rode to where the British had been encamped, and from there they went to the Allison home.

Mrs. Allison and Gertrude were glad to see Dick and his comrades, but could give no information regarding the British.

"They did not go past here," said Gertrude.

The youths then went over and saw George Hilton.

He said the same thing, that the British had not come in this direction.

The three Liberty Boys then returned to where the British had been encamped and made their way to the river.

At a ford they found tracks of men and horses in the sand, and knew that the redcoats had crossed here.

"They have gone west," said Dick.

"We will follow them," said Bob.

They rode across the river and headed westward.

They reached the top of a hill about two miles from the river, and here they paused to take a look around.

"I see them!" cried Bob, almost immediately.

"Where?" from Sam.

"Yonder, to the southwestward."

The youths looked in the direction indicated, and saw the British army making its way along.

While they were watching the British came to a halt, and presently Bob exclaimed:

"They're going into camp!"

"I believe that you are right," said Dick.

"Yes," said Sam; "that is what they are doing."

"I don't understand it," from Dick.

"Nor I," from Bob; "why are they going into camp out in the middle of the open country?"

"So that it will be impossible for us to advance and make an attack on them without being seen coming, I suppose."

The youths watched till they were sure the British had gone into camp, and then Dick turned to Sam and said:

"Sam, you return to the encampment and tell General Greene the news."

"All right, Dick."

"And you will guide the patriot army to this spot."

"Very well."

Sam leaped into the saddle and set out at once.

He rode swiftly, and about two hours and a half later he arrived at the patriot encampment.

He went at once to General Greene's tent and made his report.

"Good!" said the general; "we will break camp at once and start on the march to the point in question. You will act as guide."

"Very well, sir."

Sam went to the Liberty Boys' quarters and told the youths of the success of himself and comrades in tracking the redcoats.

The youths were glad that the British had been gotten track of, and that the patriot army was to break camp and go after them.

An hour later the patriot soldiers were on the march.

They arrived at the point where Dick and Bob had been left by Sam about the middle of the afternoon.

Dick and Bob were not there.

The British army was still in camp where it had been

when Sam took his departure, and it seemed strange that the two youths should have gone away.

The patriot soldiers went into camp on the slope of the hill that was away from the British, and their presence could not be detected.

"If the British stay where they are till to-night we will surround them and make an attack," General Greene told the members of his staff.

They agreed that this would be a good plan.

The British showed no inclination to leave.

They had put up their tents, and it looked as though they intended remaining awhile.

This would suit the patriots first rate.

The Liberty Boys were somewhat worried over the disappearance of Dick and Bob.

They feared that something had happened to the two.

Perhaps some redcoats had come to the hill and succeeded in capturing the youths.

The Liberty Boys hoped that such was not the case, however.

It turned out that their fears were groundless.

About an hour after the patriot army had gone into camp Dick and Bob appeared, and they had a prisoner—evidently a British spy.

"He gave us a good race," said Dick; "but we finally caught him."

They conducted the prisoner to General Greene's tent.

"Whom have you there?" the general asked.

"A British spy, sir, I am sure," said Dick.

The general eyed the prisoner sternly.

"Do you know what the fate of spies usually is, sir?" the patriot commander asked.

"I am no spy," was the sullen reply.

"Oh, you are not, eh?"

"No, sir."

"How are you going to prove it?"

The fellow looked uneasily at the questioner, and then said:

"I don't know."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DEFEAT THAT WAS A VICTORY.

"It would be a difficult matter to prove that you are not a spy," said General Greene. "A better thing for you to do is to acknowledge that you are a spy and then tell me all you know regarding the British army and the intentions of the commander, and then, perhaps, I may decide to not hang you."

"I have nothing to tell," was the reply.

"Oh, very well," coldly; "if you prefer to be shot or hanged to earning your liberty in the way I have suggested, that is your privilege."

The fellow would not say a word, and so the general ordered that he be taken away and placed under guard.

This was done, and then the soldiers settled down to await the coming of darkness.

The Liberty Boys, especially, were glad that the prospects were so good for a battle.

They were eager to get at the British, and hoped that the attack would not be a failure like the one that had been attempted before had been.

"It ought to be a success," said Dick; "we can surround the British to-night and keep them surrounded, and the battle can be prosecuted in the daytime as well as at night."

"That's so," said Bob.

When evening came the patriot soldiers ate cold food, for they did not dare start campfires, for fear the British would see the light from them and the smoke.

At last darkness set in, and the soldiers got ready for work.

The command to march did not come till about ten o'clock, however.

Then the soldiers set out.

It was quite dark, and there was not much danger that they would be seen.

They marched to within half a mile of the British encampment, and then the soldiers moved to the right and to the left, and slowly and carefully the work of surrounding the British encampment was gone through with.

Two hours later the work had been successfully accomplished.

It was now midnight, and a good time to make an attack.

General Greene gave the signal for the attack, and the patriot soldiers rushed forward.

They were seen and heard by the British sentinels, who fired upon them and then retreated in hot haste into the encampment.

The redcoats leaped to arms.

But the patriots poured in a volley before their enemies could get ready for work, and considerable execution was done.

Then the battle raged in earnest.

Volley after volley was fired by the patriots, and the British replied in kind.

Bullets whistled through the air and men fell on both sides, though the British lost more than was the case with the patriots.

The battle continued about three hours, and then the patriots withdrew out of range and went into camp till morning.

The weary soldiers threw themselves down upon the ground and were quickly asleep.

Of course, sentinels and pickets were stationed so that it would be impossible for the British to take the patriots by surprise, even if they tried.

When morning came the patriot army and the British army began to stir.

The soldiers ate their breakfasts and then looked to their weapons, for they expected that the battle would be renewed.

And their expectations were realized.

The patriot soldiers received orders to begin the attack, and they obeyed with alacrity.

The British were in no wise backward, and soon the battle was raging.

Light artillery on both sides were brought into play and the cannon-balls flew thick and fast.

About ten o'clock the patriots charged, but the British veterans hurled them back, and General Greene, seeing that it would be impossible to defeat the enemy, decided to withdraw.

He gave the command and the patriot army moved back to the timber on the hillside, a mile distant.

The patriot soldiers were somewhat disappointed, but they knew that their general was a shrewd man, and that he was probably doing the best thing that possibly could be done.

It was found that the patriots had lost seventeen, killed outright, while forty-four had been more or less seriously wounded.

The British had suffered much more than this, the patriots were sure.

Two Liberty Boys had been killed and five were wounded.

They were eager to go after the enemy again, however, and were sorry that the patriot commander had retreated.

They expected to get another chance at the British soon, however.

Shortly after the noon hour the British broke camp and marched away.

The patriots watched the enemy in surprise and disappointment.

The soldiers hoped that they would receive orders to break camp and follow the enemy, but the order did not come.

General Greene called a council of war and discussed the matter at length with the members of the staff.

It was his opinion that General Cornwallis was simply intending to move to a stronger position, and the other officers agreed with him.

So the patriot army remained where it was, and when night had come scouts were sent out to see what had become of the British.

Dick was one of the scouts, and he finally got the British army located.

It was on a ridge heavily wooded.

Dick slipped up as close as possible and took a good survey of the encampment.

He saw that the British had fixed up for a stay of some length.

They had put up their tents and were throwing up earthworks.

Dick, having made a success of his work, stole away and made his way back to the patriot encampment.

He went and reported to General Greene, and the officer complimented him and said that he had done well.

During the following week the British were busy getting recruits, and General Greene, not wishing to attack while the enemy occupied such a strong position, moved his army to Guilford.

General Cornwallis, having strengthened his army, now broke camp and went after the patriot army.

The result was that on the 15th of March a hard-fought battle took place at Guilford.

In this battle the patriots were defeated, but the victory was a dear one for the British, for they lost more men than the patriots did, and three days later General Cornwallis and the remnant of his army set out for Wilmington.

General Greene had crippled the British to such an extent that they could not do anything more in North Carolina.

The battle of Guilford, indeed, practically closed the campaign in the state, and while, as has been said, the battle was tactically a win for the British, it was, strategically considered, a victory for the patriots.

In other words, it was a defeat that was very much a victory.

General Green pursued General Cornwallis toward Wilmington, but failed to catch him.

They did not again meet in battle till weeks later up in Virginia.

Thus ends the story of "The Liberty Boys on the Neuse River."

We will simply add that George Hilton and Gertrude Allison were married a year later, and that they lived very happily, as they deserved to do.

Captain Shipley, who had caused the two so much trouble, was killed in the battle of Guilford, so he never crossed the paths of the two again.

General Greene's campaign in North Carolina, in which the Liberty Boys played such a prominent part, was indeed an important one, and it aided materially in helping to bring about the ultimate surrender of General Cornwallis at Yorktown.

THE END.

The next number (246) of "The Liberty Boys of '76" will contain "THE LIBERTY BOYS AND BENEDICT ARNOLD; OR, HOT WORK WITH A TRAITOR," by Harry Moore.

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